

SIX YOUNG HUNTERS



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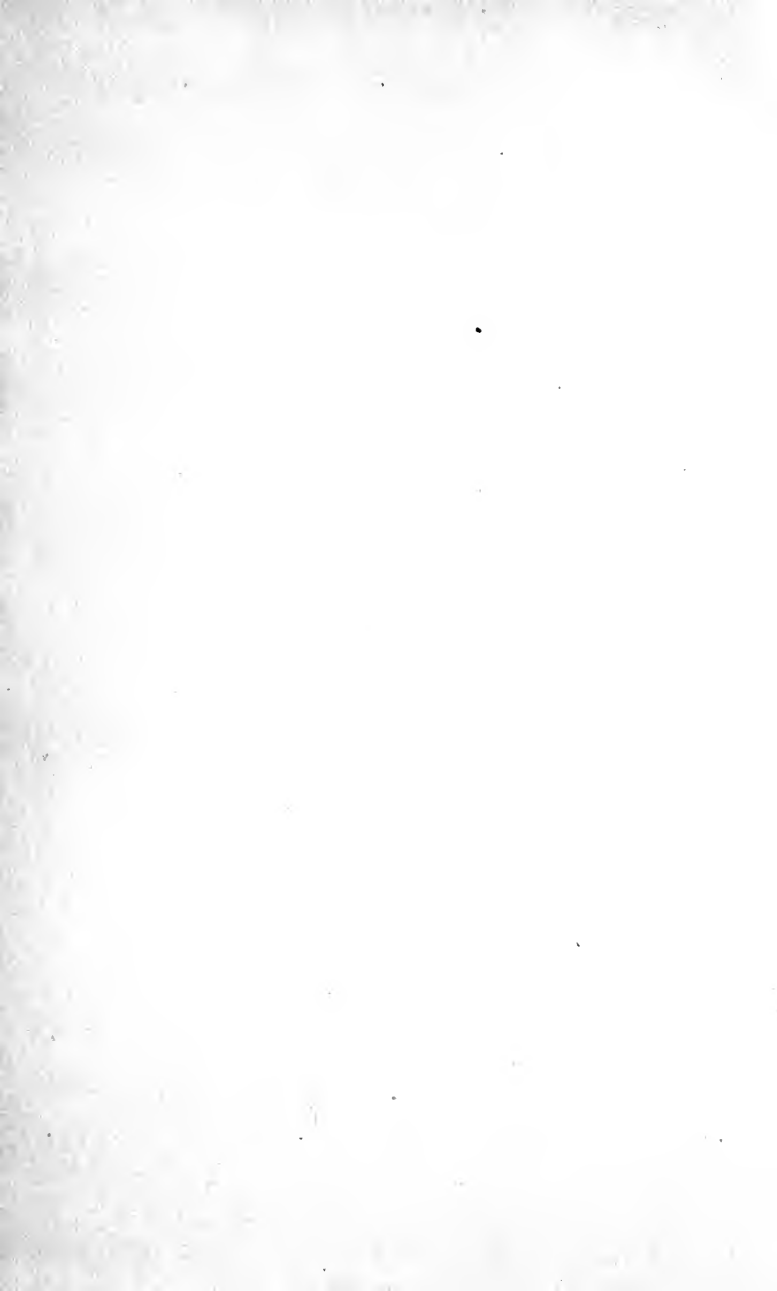
Grandma

to

Edley

March 8th

1924







WALTER.

SIX YOUNG HUNTERS

OR

*THE ADVENTURES OF THE
GREYHOUND CLUB*

BY

W. GORDON PARKER

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY THE AUTHOR

BOSTON
LEE AND SHEPARD PUBLISHERS

1905

LOAN STACK

~~47656~~

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SIX YOUNG HUNTERS

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CONTENTS

CHAPTER I

	PAGE
DEER LODGE	I

CHAPTER II

AN ACQUAINTANCE	17
---------------------------	----

CHAPTER III

AN UNEXPECTED ENEMY	39
-------------------------------	----

CHAPTER IV

WITH THE GREYHOUNDS	51
-------------------------------	----

CHAPTER V

THE OUTLAWS' RETREAT	67
--------------------------------	----

CHAPTER VI

THE HOLD-UP	83
-----------------------	----

CHAPTER VII

AN EXCURSION	101
------------------------	-----

CHAPTER VIII

THE BEAR HUNT	129
-------------------------	-----

CHAPTER IX

	PAGE
STARTLING NEWS	152

CHAPTER X

FIREFLY IS TAKEN	170
----------------------------	-----

CHAPTER XI

THE OUTLAWS FOILED	188
------------------------------	-----

CHAPTER XII

WALTER A CAPTIVE	207
----------------------------	-----

CHAPTER XIII

HARRY ON THE TRAIL	231
------------------------------	-----

CHAPTER XIV

HANK DOBSON	259
-----------------------	-----

CHAPTER XV

THE LAST OF THE OUTLAWS	280
-----------------------------------	-----

CHAPTER XVI

FURTHER DEVELOPMENTS	295
--------------------------------	-----

CHAPTER XVII

THE DEER CHASE	315
--------------------------	-----

CHAPTER XVIII

CONCLUSION	329
----------------------	-----

ILLUSTRATIONS

	PAGE
WALTER	<i>Frontispiece</i>
HEADING	I
SELECTING PONIES AT UNCLE JOHN'S	9
TASSO, SAXONY, AND THE RABBIT	14
TASSO WINS	16
DISCUSSING PRINCE ROYAL	30
TAILPIECE	38
HARRY HEARS THE WILDCAT	46
TAILPIECE	50
INITIAL T.	51
FEEDING UPON A JACK-RABBIT	54
A MORNING'S COURSING	57
TAILPIECE	66
TAILPIECE	82
JOSÉ CABRILLO	90
TRACK-WALKER	99
INITIAL H	101
VON AND THE QUAIL	109
TAILPIECE	128

	PAGE
THE BEAR APPEARS	147
CANOE	150
WALTER	152
PRINCE ROYAL	169
TAILPIECE	187
PIETRO	196
TAILPIECE	206
HARRY	230
INITIAL A	231
CABRILLO'S RETREAT	265
HANK DOBSON	278
HEAD OF INDIAN	294
INITIAL T	295
INITIAL P	315
HARRY GOES OVER THE CLIFF	322
THE FIRST STAG KILLED	328
TAILPIECE	335



SIX YOUNG HUNTERS

CHAPTER I

DEER LODGE

Away to the forest when autumn's a-dying,
To follow the music of vanishing hounds.
Clap spurs to your hunter — hark! — list to their crying!
They're racing in vain with the deer's lightning bounds.

THE home of the Greyhound Club, Deer Lodge, is situated in one of the wildest and least frequented parts of the Indian Territory, or more properly the portion owned and held by the Osage and

other Indian tribes, on the banks of Grouse creek. It is a model place for young sportsmen to enjoy a month's hunting and fishing, for deer and wolves are plentiful in the surrounding country, and black bass swarm in the stream. The house stands upon grass-land overlooking the winding water below, at the edge of a grove of gigantic oaks and cottonwoods. Built entirely of logs, it presents a strikingly attractive picture to the boy lover of the rod and gun, especially during the hunting season, when the wide veranda is alive with young sportsmen, who usually return about twilight. Some are on horseback, some in canoes which they tie to the jetty at the base of the cliff, and some afoot. Those who return with the tired greyhounds usually carry a deer or two across their saddles, while those who return with the setters have game-bags overflowing with quails, ducks, or prairie-chickens. Then, while old Tony, the negro servant, prepares supper, the boys gradually gather upon the veranda and discuss the day's sport to their hearts' content; for they are trusty, fun-loving lads, these members of the Greyhound Club, who have left honest and faithful records at school, and who consequently enjoy their well-earned vacation to the fullest extent. They had all met the previous autumn at a famous New England academy, and soon became fast friends. Each one loved a good horse and gun as much as any boy can, and cared little for the set

of fellows who frequented the billiard rooms in town and played cards. It was natural, therefore, that they should drift apart from the crowd led by Sinclair and others of his type, and form a club of their own.

One stormy Saturday night in March, it chanced that five of the present Greyhound Club had gathered in Walter Hillman's room, and were seated about the cheerful hearth, telling stories of mountain and field and sea, or listening to the moaning of the wind and to the ceaseless driving of the sleet against the window panes. They were Harry and Arthur Martin, and their old friend, Jack Trehearne, all residing in the city of New York; Paul Marshall, a Southern boy, and last, but not least, the genial host, whose supply of pop-corn and apples seemed inexhaustible.

"What a glorious night this would be in the woods, after a day's shooting," said Walter, patting his favorite setter, which held possession of a bear-skin rug. "I'll admit it's always jolly to be about a cheerful blaze with a company of good fellows, but somehow it never seems quite like the camp-fire."

"And I quite agree with you," continued Arthur in reply. "I hate to think of spending the coming summer in the same old way; most of us have had enough of base-ball and tennis. Why can't we form a sort of club and rough it through vacation? It

would put us in superb condition to begin training for the foot-ball team in the fall."

"An excellent idea, Arthur!" was Walter's quick exclamation. "And now this gives me a good opportunity of unfolding a little scheme that has been occupying my mind a great deal of late. In the first place, I believe I know the very spot for such a camp; that is, if it isn't too far to go. My father, as some of you have heard me say, handles large numbers of cattle, which he usually buys in Texas and ships to the Indian Territory to pasture and fatten for the market. He leases these pastures from the Indians, who are always very friendly. I have been hunting there several times with some of father's cowboys, and the country is alive with large and small game. These two bear-skin rugs and that deer's head," he continued, pointing to the articles in question, "are reminders of last summer's outing. There are numerous well-wooded creeks that would be just suitable for a sportsman's club. What do you say?"

What would any boy reply to such a proposition? Of course they were enthusiastic over the idea at once, and asked Walter numberless questions. Harry wanted to know what the biggest game was, and how it was hunted, while the more thoughtful Paul didn't see how they could build a comfortable lodge and do any hunting the same summer.

"We have sufficient time if we commence at once," was Walter's wise response. "To begin with, we must all get the consent of our parents as soon as possible, which is the main point. I will write to-night to Uncle John, tell him our plans, and I can promise you he will do everything in his power to help us."

"Understood," said Harry, cheerfully. "Now tell us about the game."

"Well, Harry," replied Walter, with an amused twinkle in his eye, "you will need every gun and rod in your collection, which is saying a good deal. There is any quantity of work there for fly-rods, setters, and spaniels; and there are jack-rabbits, wolves, and deer for the greyhounds. That is the sport of sports, I tell you, and the greyhound, in my opinion, is the king of dogs. After you have taken a gallop with a couple of them, and have started and caught a fleet-footed jack-rabbit, you will agree with me; and as for the excitement of a deer chase,—well, just wait until you see for yourselves, for it makes me feel like leaving school to think of it!" with which conclusion Walter arose and paced the room impatiently.

That settled the matter. The boys talked and formed plans long into the night, and then crept noiselessly off to their respective dormitories to dream uninterruptedly of bear hunts or deer coursing in a comparatively unknown, unfrequented country.

Walter sat up a long hour after his friends had left, and wrote a letter to his bachelor uncle that must have won him then and there; for he proved himself true to the boys, and it was mainly due to Walter's kind uncle's interest that the Greyhound Club was firmly organized, as many objections were raised by the boys' parents, all of which were finally overcome by Uncle John. Then nothing was heard from him for a month or more, and it is needless to say that the boys in consequence wore gloomy faces to recitations. One day, however, after a long wait, Walter received a letter which caused him to desert his algebra, tip over an ink-bottle, and rush out to join his friends.

This is what he read to them:—

PAWHUSKA, April 25th.

MY DEAR WALTER: Perhaps you have been wondering why you have not heard from me of late in regard to the hunting trip you and your friends expect to make here this summer. Well, to tell the truth, I have taken matters in my own hands, and have had a camp erected upon one of the bluffs at Grouse creek, very near the spot where you and Pietro shot your second bear last year. I shall not say much about it, but might state that there is ample room for a dozen of your friends, with as many horses.

If any of the boys own canoes, tell them to be sure to bring them, as they will come in handy for chasing crippled ducks and for bass fishing.

I suppose you have already told them of the sport to be had here with greyhounds, and that in order to enjoy it fully,

each should own at least one, which would also help to make a pack. It would be well to get them now, as the greyhound, as a rule, is a peculiar dog, and makes friends slowly. Get the best dogs obtainable, as the deer are fleet as the wind. Pietro has been instructed to watch and select twenty of the best ponies at the ranch, so that your friends may have something from which to choose.

It would seem to me advisable to have Tony do the cooking, as you won't care to bother with it after a long ride on a hot day. Speaking of riding, reminds me to say that I have been galloping Leveller for you. He's in grand shape, and follows the hounds beautifully.

Let me know of anything you wish done or left undone, and be sure and write me when you start. In the mean time, remember me to the boys.

Your affectionate

UNCLE JOHN.

P.S. I have furnished the camp only, as I suppose you and your friends will bring a few of the trophies you have at your rooms and at home, and arrange things to suit yourselves. Pietro says the herdsmen who have just arrived report a loss of a half-dozen young steers by a panther. Here's a pretty piece of news, and a commission for your friends if he holds out until summer.

J. H.

This was a joyful and welcome surprise. If Uncle John could have heard some of the expressions of delight that were uttered by the boys on this occasion, he would have felt even then fully repaid for

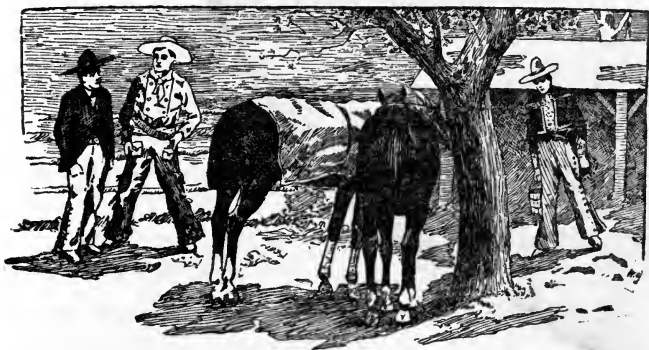
his time and trouble spent in the erection of the lodge. The sincere letters of thanks he received from them in reply amused him greatly, for he had been a boy himself, and knew boys well.

Soon after the receipt of Uncle John's letter, Harry and Arthur received a pair of greyhounds from New York; then Jack and Paul became the proud possessors of one each; and finally Eugene Marshall, Paul's cousin, who completed the club of six, bought another. That was why the students at the academy began to speak of Harry Martin and his followers as the "Greyhound Club," and the hunting trip was the sole topic of conversation, even after the base-ball season opened. Many a manly good fellow's application for membership was received, considered, and rejected, as the six chums had decided the club complete among themselves.

When school finally closed for the long summer vacation, the boys took the first available train west, and were met at the little station by Uncle John, with whom they spent a couple of very enjoyable days at the ranch.

Pietro had quartered a score of spirited ponies in the corral, and the boys were kept busy roping, saddling, and endeavoring to settle upon their mounts. As Jack had shipped Blue Rocket from New York, he and Walter were at liberty to assist their friends in a choice, which occupied an entire day. The four

bronchos were finally selected, however, the great covered wagons packed to their utmost capacity, and as Tony shuffled out with the last frying-pan and dipper, Uncle John cracked his whip, the boys called a last good-by, and the journey to the lodge began.



SELECTING PONIES AT UNCLE JOHN'S.

The lads went into ecstasies over the beautiful little camp, and insisted upon thanking Uncle John again and again, pressing him to stay and enjoy the game they promised to kill for him. But he had important business back at the ranch, he said, and returned at daybreak the following morning.

Our story opens on the second day after the arrival of the club at the lodge. They had followed out Uncle John's advice of the previous morning to the very letter, and had spent the day in short walks, in

resting, and in making things comfortable. It was a pleasure to look about and arrange their new home; to see the ponies well quartered under Pietro's untiring care, and the canoes safely floated and fastened to the jetty.

The boys slept soundly that night, but before the sun had fairly shown himself above the towering crags across the creek the next morning, they were dressed and out upon the veranda. It would be difficult to recognize in the group any one of the neatly dressed students we met in Walter's room at the academy. Harry had donned a complete suit of black velvet, the gold-corded trousers cut after the flaring Mexican fashion. A gaudy scarlet sash was tied about his waist, at the end of which little silver bells jingled in harmony with his spurs at every step he took. A great broad-brimmed sombrero completed the boy's wildly picturesque attire, which was a fair sample of what the others wore while at the lodge.

"A capital morning for a rabbit chase, fellows!" called Walter from the stable, as he tightened Leveler's saddle-band, and then mounted the impatient animal and galloped out to his friends. "Pietro says there's one down there by those jack-oaks, and that he noticed him every morning while they were building the lodge."

By the time Walter had finished, Harry was also

mounted upon his frisky little pony, and as the greyhounds were already racing in circles about the grounds, the other boys concluded to see the fun from the veranda. They were all extremely anxious to see how Harry's handsome broncho would run with Leveller, and to see their favorite dogs extended for the first time in a race. Walter whistled continually until they all came up, and then he and Harry turned their horses and cantered away for the tall grass by the jack-oaks.

What a pleasure it was to be astride a restive animal on such a glorious morning, with school-books carefully packed away until autumn, and examinations creditably passed! Was there a boy among that fun-loving throng who regretted his hours of hard work during the school term? Decidedly there was not. It had been trying to stand before a dismal, dusty blackboard in the autumn twilight and solve countless original geometrical propositions, with the foot-ball team plunging about the campus below, cheered by the school. And it had been hard to refuse a tempting invitation to a secret spread, and devote one's self to Cicero, well knowing that in doing so one was denying one's self some of Chap's delicious pumpkin pies and cheese. Now that their hard work was finished, however, and they were about to begin an uninterrupted summer's hunt, they looked back at it all with the keenest pleasure.

"Now, Harry," cautioned Walter, as they rode along together, "you must be careful and not ride too hard after a rabbit jumps up, for fear of riding down the dogs. They are inexperienced, and are liable to run under the horses. Back, Tasso!" he concluded, with a cut of his whip at his favorite courser, which showed a disposition to keep too far in advance of the pack that trotted along behind the horses.

"But surely they can outrun us?"

"Of course they can, but they sometimes get in the way all the same. Take the dogs as they are upon your right, for an illustration. If we should 'jump' a rabbit in advance of us and on my left, we would naturally have the start of the pack, which would cut right across our course. Then, too, a rabbit often turns at right angles many times at the beginning as well as at the end of a race, so it is well to be cautious. Steady, now! Hunt 'em up, Tasso!"

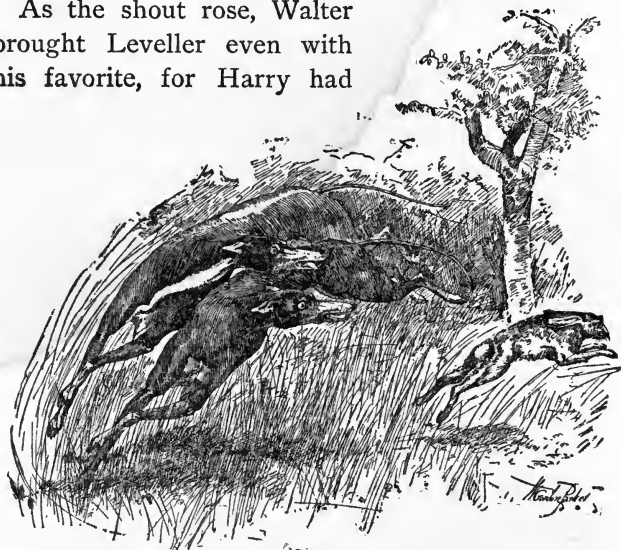
With these explanations, the boys slowly entered the grass by the oaks before mentioned. All eyes were turned upon them from the lodge as Walter gradually separated from Harry and cautiously moved forward. At intervals the graceful greyhounds would stop and look about them, trembling in every limb. The first rays of the rising sun shone bright and clear on Leveller's chestnut coat, flooding the grass-land and valley in a softened golden light.

The dogs and riders had advanced to the centre of the tallest grass, when a rustling was heard just ahead, soon after followed by an immense jack-rabbit rising to view, his great ears laid close to his back, and running like the wind.

With wonderful speed the pack followed, Tasso in the lead, with Harry's Diamond and Eugene's Saxony close together. The rabbit was running in dead earnest, his lightning stride quickening at every jump. Straight for the prairie in front of the lodge he flew, followed by the sweeping pack. Saxony had gained upon Tasso, who was close to the hare at the first turning. With open jaws and gleaming teeth the gallant greyhound made his drive to kill, but the now fairly flying hare was too quick for him, and was running at a tangent before Tasso and Saxony, followed by Rambler, Diana, Diamond, and Boomerang, could recover. Again they came up like a whirlwind, only to be thrown off again by the "jack's" sudden wrenching and twisting. With their master's shouts ringing in their ears, the coursers wore down upon the hare for the third time, as they flew by the lodge on the return. At the jack-oaks the hounds came up with apparently the same lightning stride, steadied themselves, following each turn with wonderful agility. They gained until their third effort to kill was unsuccessful, and as they swept by the onlookers for the third time, with Tasso gradually lessening the inter-

vening distance by great sweeping strides, a hoarse roar went up from the boys, louder and louder, changing every second: "Hie on, Saxony!" "Stop him, Tasso, stop him!" "Turn him, Diamond!" "Tasso has him!" "Rambler's gaining!" "Tasso will get him!" "Tasso wins!"

As the shout rose, Walter brought Leveller even with his favorite, for Harry had



TASSO, SAXONY, AND THE RABBIT.

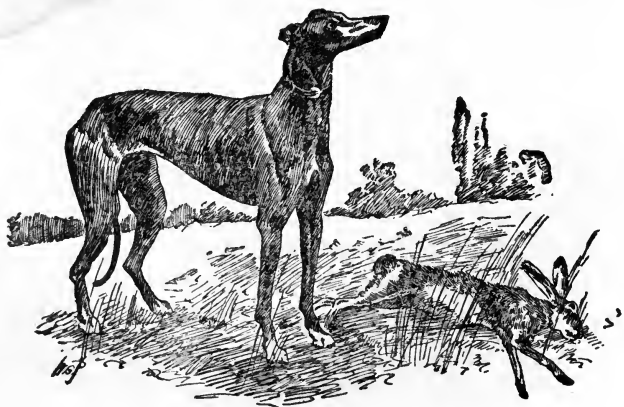
lost ground rapidly from the start, and then they ran side by side; with one crowning effort, Tasso's grand stride quickened, and in another second ended the chase.

"Three cheers for the Greyhound Club, and a dozen for Uncle John!" shouted Eugene from the veranda, waving his sombrero above his head; "and three times three for Tasso, who kills the first quarry at Deer Lodge!" The cheers were given with a will as the boys rushed down the incline, earnestly discussing the merits of the different dogs and expressing a wish to continue the sport. But Walter was afraid to work them too much at first, he said, so the merry company returned to Tony's inviting breakfast of hot coffee, corn-bread, broiled quail, and bacon. While they are enjoying the meal with appetites that only the fresh morning air of the prairie can give, let us look about and see what has been done to make the neatly constructed house a model home for young sportsmen.

As the stranger enters through the hospitable doors, he finds himself in a large, comfortable looking room. There is an immense fireplace at one end, built entirely of stone, the mantel and chimney finished in rustic woodwork. A magnificent deer's head looks down from above, at the right and left of which are hung a couple of Tracy's studies of field dogs. About the room are hung well mounted elk horns, deer, and antelope heads in profusion. Upon the elk and deer horns the boys have placed their entire collection of guns, including numberless large and small gauge rifles and hammerless shot-guns.

Directly opposite the hearth, at the other end of the room, stands a large table, composed entirely of twisted oak branches and planking. It is heaped high with spurs, revolvers, riding whips, cartridges, and fly-rods; game-bags and bridles, hunting knives and stirrups. The floor is covered with comfortable rugs, bear and panther skins; fencing foils, masks, and gloves are crossed within easy reach, while a medley of hunting pictures by prominent artists papers the roughly-hewn walls irregularly.

A spacious door leads to the dining-room and kitchen, where old Tony rules undisturbed. Stairs lead to the bunks on the second story, which is divided into rooms for the members of the club, Tony, and Pietro.



CHAPTER II

AN ACQUAINTANCE

HARRY was not at all pleased with the running of his pony in the rabbit race before breakfast. He had selected him from the many horses Uncle John had kept at the ranch for the purpose of giving the boys a chance to please themselves; and while the other boys were discussing the race and commenting enthusiastically upon Leveller's wonderful speed, Harry silently devoured his share of the tempting viands Tony placed before our heroes. He realized that he must have a faster horse in order to follow the pack with Walter, who was sure to be in at every death. He further realized that the club was extremely anxious to see more of the sport so successfully opened with a young and inexperienced pack, and that as soon as the dogs had become sufficiently hardened, deer coursing would be in order.

After breakfast, Arthur and Eugene placed the well-filled lunch basket Tony had given them in one of the canoes, and paddled down the stream, determined to capture a string of the bass Uncle John had

talked so much about. Walter, Jack, and Paul took the setters and started for the prairie, which left Harry alone, as he had declined to join either party. He went into the house and selected a book, which he endeavored to read in the shade of one of the large oaks; but his mind was not in it, and the book was soon returned to the case. Tony could be heard humming familiar songs as he busied himself with the breakfast dishes, while Pietro's voice was now and then heard as he spoke to the different ponies during the operation of grooming. The greyhounds were sleeping soundly in the sunshine, tired from their exertions of the early morning. For want of something better to do, Harry walked out to the neat little stable in the rear of the lodge. He always enjoyed seeing the double row of comfortable stalls, the spacious saddle room and paddock, and Pietro hard at work polishing bits and bridles.

"The boys aren't riding much to-day, Pietro," said Harry by way of greeting; "but we'll get enough before we leave, I dare say."

"Very likely, Master Harry. I suppose the trip from the ranch quite used them up. Well, the hosses have felt it too, though Master Walter's hoss seems fit for anything. That's a high-headed fellow, that pony of yourn."

"High-headed enough!" returned the boy, with ill-concealed disgust; "but looks don't cover the

ground. That was a pretty poor showing he made against the chestnut, you'll admit, and there's no denying he was doing his best."

"I was watching you," said Pietro, lighting his pipe and leaning against the feed bins, "and he was in earnest all the way. But the fact is, there isn't one amongst 'em that can gallop with Master Walter's hoss. Now, didn't the hounds do well at the first pop out of the box, took to it like ducks to the water! You'll have a ride you won't forget, when you head a deer away from the jack-oaks for the prairie, Master Harry." Pietro concluded by puffing at his pipe in silence, while Harry saddled his pony and rode down the prairie within a stone's throw of the timber that grew along the stream. Pietro, he told himself, was right. None of the saddlers the boys had chosen could make Leveller extend himself, and he regretted deeply that he had not purchased a well-bred animal before leaving New York. He was aware of the well-known staying qualities the ponies possessed, and rightly supposed they would stand a season's hunt in that country better than a larger horse. If the other fellows liked them, he argued, they were welcome to a whole drove, but he would commission Uncle John to send him a horse as fast and as handsome as Walter's. He knew that such a purchase would nearly exhaust the savings for which he had denied himself so much the previous

winter, but nevertheless was determined to have the saddler.

Thus occupied, Harry turned and guided his pony down the rocky path that led to the creek. He admired the judgment the little animal displayed in the descent, and the willingness with which he forded the stream. As the day became quite warm, Harry allowed the pony to choose his own gait, which was a quick, nervous walk. Following one of the numerous deer trails that led from the water, he entered a sheltered spot that appeared to be crossed and recrossed by many well-worn paths. On three sides the great stone crags completely shut it off from the outside world, while on the remaining side, where horse and rider had entered, the trees grew so thick that it was difficult to ride through at all.

As Harry rode forward, a gray wolf jumped up not sixty feet off, stopping at the rocks to get a better view of this strange intruder. Then a hawk rose slowly, finally disappearing over the ledge. Harry longed for his rifle, which he had forgotten in the all-absorbing thought of obtaining a better horse. The wolf turned and showed his teeth, an action unappreciated by the boy, who was honestly glad when he was out of sight.

Dismounting, Harry led his pony through the timber until he reached a spring that came from the rocks above. He slung the bridle-rein over his arm,

and kneeling down, began to drink. The water was clear and refreshing, and when he was at last ready to rise, he was conscious of the approach of a stranger from above. Looking up, the boy was oddly impressed with the fellow's appearance. He was roughly clad in a suit of ornamented buckskin, which bore the marks of long and faithful service. A leather belt was fastened about his waist, upon which a dozen cartridges of large gauge were held in the usual manner. He carried a repeating rifle, which he handled skilfully, without giving one the impression that he held a gun at all. His black sombrero looked well over the heavy black eyebrows and hair. While of medium size and height, Harry could see at a glance that the fellow was superbly developed for so young a man. He advanced without hesitation, on the opposite bank, placing his gun against a cottonwood with an assuring smile. Harry noticed as he did so that his teeth were very white, and that there were marks of refinement in his dark face.

"A little surprised to see me, I take it," the stranger began, evidently comprehending the boy's questioning glance, "and I can't very much hold it against you."

"Well, one doesn't expect to meet many in a place like this," replied Harry, crossing the stream, and fastening his horse to a sapling. "Have you killed anything?"

"Not yet. To be honest, I kind of watched for some of you fellows to sort o' stray away from that there camp, as I wanted to talk a little trade with you."

"Trade!" exclaimed Harry, wondering what kind of trade a young man with a rifle could be engaged in, and if he should have to walk back to camp. "We are not down here on business; and even if we were, what would prevent your coming up to the lodge?"

"I calc'lated that it would sound a bit fishy," returned the stranger, pressing his thumb against the tobacco he had placed in the bowl of his pipe, "'specially to you chaps that have not become acquainted with the laws that such fellows as me have to live up to."

"Oh! I know that no one is supposed to hunt here without a government permit," replied Harry, recalling some of Uncle John's words; "but no one would disturb you if you behaved yourselves."

"That's just it, if we behaved ourselves, which we didn't," earnestly continued the fellow, puffing vigorously at his pipe. "You see it all happened something like this: There were about eight of us fellows camping and hunting around here, summer and winter. All the boys liked a good horse and usually had one; so when the Indian police came and hunted us down on purpose to take our nags,

the boys kind o' resented the intrusion and pumped them full of lead."

"Killed them!" exclaimed Harry, casting a furtive glance at the stranger's rifle. "What happened then?"

"Nothin', until Colonel Hillman rented the ranges. Then he posted up a notice on a good many trails, saying that the boys could come and work for him if they wanted to; that it was better to brace up and work and make men. They couldn't quite get over the Indian police, though, and stayed among the hills. It was pretty cold, and much easier to shoot a steer than anything else, so we had beef a good deal that winter. The colonel naturally got mad, and posted up signs right over the others orderin' us out of the country. Most of the boys have pulled up stakes and I want to go, too. That's why I hung 'round, trustin' to meet some of you chaps and sell my horse."

"How did you know we were coming?" asked Harry, reflecting upon what he had just heard, and wondering why Uncle John had not told the club all about it.

"It was easy to guess when we saw them buildin' that there fancy log-house with the wide shelter," returned the other. "And I told myself there was a market right here same as up north, and waited."

"You were right in supposing that we should like to

be well mounted," said Harry, secretly admiring the fellow's reasoning. "What kind of a horse have you?"

"Just the right one to follow them long-legged hounds. He's a 'crackerjack,' I tell you. Would you like to see him?"

Harry replied that he certainly should, and followed his new acquaintance through the woods in silence. After five minutes' rapid walking, they struck a trail that led down to Grouse creek, and which they followed for a long mile. Emerging into a little clearing on the bank of the stream, the young fellow halted, unbuckling his belt and leaning his rifle against a fallen tree.

"Now, you had better wait here a bit," he said, "as it's rough going the rest of the way. You can shoot a squirrel or two if you're hungry, though I'll fetch the horse before long."

With these words he disappeared into the woods, leaving Harry seated upon the log, deeply puzzled over this last move.

"I suppose it's only natural, though," he finally concluded; "for he thinks I might say I saw him, and would guide Uncle John's men to his camp. But I won't mention it, if I like the looks of his horse, and I'll tell him so."

With many such comforting reflections, Harry shouldered the rifle and started down the bank of the stream in search of a squirrel. Spying one

among the topmost branches of a tall tree, he took careful aim and fired. The squirrel dropped from limb to limb, finally striking the ground. He picked it up, gathering on his return an armful of wood for the camp-fire, which he heaped upon a mass of dead leaves. Seated upon the log, it was but the work of a moment to skin and clean the animal, and he was on the point of lighting the fire when he was interrupted by a splashing in the stream, followed by a cheery voice.

"I think it must have been about here the rifle was fired," Harry heard his brother say, "for it was very plain."

"It was probably at the lodge," Eugene replied, "for I'm sure the other fellows didn't take a rifle with them."

Harry had just time to conceal himself among the bushes, which he knew would shelter his pony. In a few seconds the canoe appeared, Arthur seated in the bow with a light rifle across his knees. A couple of split bamboo rods protruded over the bow, and a fine string of bass could be seen in the stern.

"If the other fellows have done as well, it will pay to be back for supper," thought Harry, gazing in astonishment at one or two of the fish they had captured. "I won't show myself, for then they might smell a mouse; and if I don't get the horse, no one need know anything about it."

Harry watched the canoe until it disappeared around a bend in the creek, and then returned and touched a match to the dead leaves. While he was pleasantly employed in broiling the squirrel, his thoughts unwillingly reverted to his new acquaintance, and he told himself that the fellow was in all probability an outlaw. The thought was not a very pleasant one, and he tried to forget it; but it was no use, and while trying to decide what was best to be done, he heard the distinct clatter of flying hoofs, soon followed by the reappearance of his new acquaintance mounted upon a horse that went straight to the boy's heart. Harry was inclined to think he had never before seen such a graceful animal. He was jet black, with a regular white blaze, running the full length of his head, while his near forefoot and off hindfoot were white.

"He's a perfect beauty!" exclaimed Harry, with admiration, as the stranger dismounted. "And is he as good as he looks?"

"Every bit and better. Try him and see," was the confident reply.

Harry threw his leg over the saddle and galloped about the clearing. The horse moved with perfect freedom and grace, and it was hard for the boy to realize that such a prize had come so unexpectedly within his reach.

"Well, he's all and more than you said he was,"

said Harry, stopping before the young fellow, who had seated himself upon a log. "What do you ask for him?"

"A good deal more than you'll be willing to pay, pardner, so I'll just slice the difference and make it two hundred even."

"Two hundred dollars! Isn't that a very high price to ask for a horse so far from a large city?"

"Not considerin' quality, it isn't. Do you think you'll take him?"

"Well — no; not at that price. But I'll give you a hundred for him to-morrow morning, as that's every cent I have, and I'll agree not to say a word at the camp about you."

"Call it a bargain, friend, and now I'll be able to leave this country without gettin' mixed up in anything else. If you'll agree to fetch me that hundred to-morrow mornin', you can take the horse along with you."

"Hadn't you better wait till you get the money?"

"No, it's all right. A man must be scandalous mean to throw a fellow down for a hundred; and besides, I want to show you chaps what kind of a feller I am. I might be coming down this way again, and have another nag for sale."

Harry was greatly elated to think he would be able to ride the handsome black into camp that very afternoon, and tried to imagine the surprise of his

friends upon seeing him for the first time so unexpectedly mounted. It was agreed that the stranger was to ride Harry's pony back, and that he was to return to that spot the following day about ten or eleven o'clock to receive the money. The saddles and bridles were then changed, and Harry, after shaking hands with the man, mounted and galloped up the prairie towards the lodge.

As he neared the jack-oaks that crowned the ridge in front of the camp, the lad dismounted and cautiously moved forward until he could obtain an unobstructed view of what was happening upon the veranda. The boys were seated upon the railing and steps, evidently discussing the day's outing, for while Eugene held up his string of bass, Jack was seen to point towards a fine lot of birds that lay upon the grass.

"Now's my time," thought Harry, "and I'll give them something else to think about."

Throwing his leg across the saddle, he touched the handsome creature with his spur, and the next instant the restive black was galloping over the grass-land in graceful, sweeping strides, to the utter amazement of the crowd upon the veranda.

"It's Harry!" cried Arthur, rising to his feet and gazing after the rider in open-mouthed astonishment.

"Yes, and he's on a beauty," chimed in Paul.

"Or he's painted Blue Rocket black," added Wal-

ter. Then, as the horse turned and started back for the ridge, the boys called after their chum in chorus: "Hi there, Harry Martin! Bring up your galloper and let's have a look at him."

Horse and rider were soon among them, and Harry saw at once that his friends were very favorably impressed with his new mount.

"Now that's what I call tough luck," said Eugene, in disgust. "Arthur and I go out and whip the stream all the morning for a string of bass, while you three go and hunt hard for your prairie-chickens; but Harry declines to do either, and while we are gone, takes an aimless ride with his Texas broncho and returns upon a racer."

"If he is a racer," suggested Paul, with a knowing look at Walter. "I believe the chestnut can beat him."

All they could say, however, would not induce Harry to tell them how he had come into the possession of the horse. The boys followed him out to the stable, where they had a good opportunity of comparing the three horses. Pietro seemed very much surprised, but failed to advance any opinion regarding the black, and asked no questions before the boys. Harry remained behind long enough to make his new favorite comfortable, and while he was placing fresh bedding in the box-stall, the hostler stood by and looked the horse over with the eye of an expert.

"A clever galloper for these parts, Master Harry," he finally said. "Might I ask where you got him?"

"Certainly. About two or three miles below, of a young fellow clad in buckskin. He was really a very good-looking chap, Pietro, and I gathered from what he said that he and his friends killed some of Uncle John's steers last winter, and consequently got into trouble," replied Harry, who wished to do the fellow all possible justice.

"Got into trouble," exclaimed Pietro, in deep disgust, "I should say they did. They cut throats, stole cattle, and shot the Indian police. They ain't a band of mere 'dodgers,' Master Harry, I can tell you."

"'Dodgers,'" repeated Harry, "what do you mean?"

"Them that dodges the main trails for one cause or another, and rides the ridges, are dubbed 'dodgers' down here; and they are a shiftless lot. But these fellows who are led by this young Cabrillo, are as free with rifle and rum alike, and no good ever came of dealin' with 'em."

"Are they as bad as that?"

"Yes, Master Harry, you can't paint 'em too black. Why, Tony'll tell you that one of 'em came gaspin' up to the 'chuck' wagon one day, a-beggin' for water, which he got. He could just toddle off after it, he was so weak on his 'pins'; but when he did, he had Tony's only six-shooter under his shirt."



DISCUSSING PRINCE ROYAL.



"What did Tony do?" asked the boy, amused at the outlaw's method of procuring a pistol.

"Oh! he just said he hoped he'd have sense enough to strap it about him next time, and that he wouldn't be lookin' into his own six-shooter before the round-up."

"I didn't suppose they were so bold," said Harry, his cheeks blanching at the thought of how his morning's ride might have ended. "Why do you suppose they hang around here year after year?"

"'Cause it's the likeliest spot for 'em. All the states is settled up, and they've got to hang on to this or go to the penitentiary."

"Didn't you ever hunt them down?"

"We tried it a number of times, but they'd get into the mountains before we could draw on 'em. We followed the trails two or three nights at a time, but it weren't no use. It was just about as Larraby said, when they shot him in the arm from the brush: 'It's darned hard to think you're a target for a band of night-riders, boys, for the sake of a bunch of steers and a nag or two, and I'll tell the colonel so.'"

"I wonder why Colonel Hillman didn't tell us all about it," said Harry, who by this time was beginning to wish he had never seen the man of the ornamented buckskin suit. "Master Walter must know of them."

"I don't believe he does," replied the hostler, "for the colonel told me to be sure and not mention the

outlaws to any of the boys, for fear it would worry 'em. 'I believe they've left,' says he before leavin', 'for the "punchers" haven't missed a steer for a fortnight. And above all, mind you, Pietro, don't cross them while the boys are at the lodge.' "

"Do you think this fellow is really Cabrillo?"

"He'll come pretty near it, if he isn't. That ain't no cow pony, Master Harry, but a bred horse from the states," continued the hostler, in confident tones, running his right hand down the black's unblemished forelegs; "and he's a racer from flagfall to finish, or I never saw one. Now here's this Blue Rocket horse of Master Jack's; he's a good one, but built a little more on the timber-toppin' order, a likely one to follow the foxes. The chestnut'll come nearest to your saddle-girth, Master Harry, but he'll never get his nose to the front."

"I'm glad you think he's so fast," replied the boy, patting the black's glossy neck; "and I hope I'll be able to keep him without any trouble."

"Well, I don't know; it depends upon the men. I don't reckon they ever came by a galloper honest, but he's probably as much theirs as any one's, now."

"You think he's a stolen horse, then?" asked Harry, listening to all that the herdsman said with the closest attention. "If he is, they must have brought him a long way, for they don't raise thoroughbreds this side of Kentucky."

"They didn't fetch him so far, neither. You see it was about like this when the 'strip' was opened,—that's Oklahoma, you know. The land had all been surveyed and laid off in quarter-sections by the government, and was to be run for at a certain hour on a certain day, which was to be settled on in Washington. All the towns along the state line were 'chock' full for months before the run, and boomers kept busy trainin' the best kind of nags to make the gallop with. They lined up in hundreds for miles on the day of the openin', just facin' the soldiers, and when the gun sounded they had a race I'll never forget. The best nags went out in front, and gen'rally got good claims; but when night come the Cabrillo gang jumped in from the mountains, stole the fastest hosses, and robbed or shot the poor fellows a-restin' by their stakes, who couldn't follow 'em and keep their claims too."

This was too much for Harry, who related the events of the morning just as they had taken place, not omitting to mention that he had agreed to pay the hundred dollars on the morrow. "I think it much better to leave the horse in his stall, don't you?" he ended by saying, as the hostler shook his head dubiously, eying the black the while.

"No, Master Harry, I don't. Take the money and the hoss with you, and if they want both, let 'em have both, for they'll get 'em anyway. Those are

about the colonel's wishes, I reckon, and you'd best remember the good will of a dog's better than the ill will."

"But I can't afford to do that," protested the boy, earnestly, whittling a bit of pine wood impatiently; "you know that a hundred dollars is a great deal of money to give up without a fight."

"Of course it is. But when it comes to dealin' with outlaws and the like, a hundred dollars is a low price for their good will; besides, the man may have told you the truth, and is countin' on pullin' stakes. If that's so, then you'll have the horse to ride all summer, and nothin' to worry about. It wouldn't be any fun to gallop around in sight of camp, knowin' as you would that a scoundrel was hidin' out to rob you and take your nag." Pietro's words sounded sensible and right, and Harry made no reply as he joined his friends with a heavy heart.

"It's tough luck," he told himself, recalling some of his hunts for meadow-larks about New York, which were occasionally ended by a lot of rowdies relieving him of his target rifle and game-bag. "I thought we'd be free from those fellows down here, and that they lived only for the messenger boys of the great cities, who delight in 'The Adventures of the Dalton Gang,' or 'Wild Jim, the Boy Scout.'"

"Supper, Mars' Paul," said Tony, appearing at the dining-room door in time to interrupt a lively

fencing bout between Jack and Eugene. "I's got some of dem quails and chickens a-piping hot for the young gentl'men, and I can't hab dem wait, 'deed I can't."

The foils were recrossed upon the walls, the masks and gloves thrown upon the table, and the club gathered about the inviting supper with many a light-hearted laugh. The windows were thrown wide open, admitting the fresh southerly breeze, laden with the songs of meadow-larks and mocking-birds. The whole valley lay half in sunshine, half in shadow, which soon merged into a happy flood of purple light, cooling the air and freshening the sun-warmed prairie, over which droves of cattle were seen to make their way to the lines of stunted jack-oaks and cottonwoods that marked the position of a half-dozen streamlets.

"To-morrow we'll have a run with the dogs?" said Walter, glancing questioningly about at his chums, who seemed almost too busy to answer.

"Of course we will," replied Arthur, watching his brother closely, "for I am very anxious to see how the new member of the cavalry will behave, and hope to see both a horse and a rabbit race."

"Good!" cried Eugene. "I believe my gray is going to give a good account of himself; and so does Pietro, who says that he was at one time one of the fastest horses among the Osages."

"We ought to start in time to get up a coyote or a wolf," continued Walter. "A great many are hiding during the day in that strip of woods that forms the second ridge from the jack-oaks, and it is my opinion that we can start one before sunrise."

"Then let's call it settled," exclaimed Jack. "I can hardly wait," he continued, as he pictured there in the twilight the galloping horses and the sweeping pack, and almost heard the wild shouts of his friends as time after time the flying hare would turn and gain a fresh start.

"Well, fellows, don't lose any sleep worrying over the speed of your mounts," said Walter, with a smile. "You know the unexpected always happens, and the sleepest-looking broncho may be the first in at the death."

"How about the dogs?" asked Paul.

"The same is true of them," replied Walter. "I never saw a lot of green hounds do so well before in my life. It's true they ran over the hare a number of times and failed to pick it up, but that's to be expected at the start."

The boys discussed the day's shooting and fishing a while longer, then gradually gathered upon the veranda with their banjos and guitars, singing songs of college life or the hunting field until they were hoarse. Sombreros, leather belts, and revolvers lay discarded upon the porch or in the lodge, and in

place of the heavy hunting and riding boots the boys wore light, comfortable moccasins.

As the moon and stars gradually appeared, the whole valley looked dense and black by contrast, save where the light silvered the quiet stream. Far away to the westward the rolling prairie resembled a summer sea, sailed by occasional lines of jack-oaks and cottonwoods, whose scrawny arms looked like a dismantled mast and crosstrees against the horizon. As the shadows grew deeper, the boys compared the wild region with the vicinity of Shelter Island, where they had spent many pleasant vacations, or with the Maine woods.

"It's not pleasant to think that these few hundred miles are practically all that remains for the Indians," said Walter, with a sigh, "and that they will soon be extinct. Father says that not twenty years ago the country about here was alive with deer, antelopes, and bears; that the cowboys used to start their ponies at the herds of antelopes for the fun of seeing them run, and that a man could count a hundred deer a day. The Indians and outlaws have slaughtered nearly everything."

"Don't you suppose they'll ever become a civilized race?" the boys asked.

"No more so than they are now. They've been unable to resist the temptations of whiskey and an idle life, and have rapidly decreased. It always hurts

me to see an Indian chief trade his deerskin moccasins, leggings, and finery for a pint of bad whiskey, for I know he'll never make another pair; and tailor-made trousers and a derby hat look as much out of place on an Indian as a wig would on a soup tureen!"

"Don't they ever get out nowadays and have the good old hunts one reads about?" asked Arthur.

"They get as far as the war-paint on a quarterly-payment day, and are happily unconscious of the rest," Walter quickly replied.

"I do hope they'll remain unconscious of the existence of Deer Lodge," said Eugene; "and above all, I hope they'll not visit it while in a bad state of mind, or while recovering from too deep a flirtation with the flowing bowl," at which the boys laughed heartily. They chatted for some time of the Indians and their much-regretted though inevitable downfall, and then climbed the stairs and tumbled into bed, little guessing what thrilling events were to take place in and about the camp before many days had passed.



CHAPTER III

AN UNEXPECTED ENEMY

"I DON'T half a quarter like the idea," said Pietro to Harry the following day, as the lad saddled and bridled the black to his satisfaction, "and I reckon I'd ought to go 'long. But it wouldn't make no difference, and you'd best do as I say."

As the boy turned and cantered off, the hostler repeated his advice of the previous afternoon. Harry had slept little that night, as Pietro's view of the situation had had anything but a soothing effect upon him. He had tossed about on his pillow, picturing the coming interview with the bandit in a dozen different ways. Once or twice he had stepped from the bushes and had confronted him with a fine brace of pistols, every move indicating that he was no stranger to such business. Then, again, he would demand the money and horse, following the demand by flourishing a bright dagger; and before morning, Harry honestly wished he had never made the acquaintance of José Cabrillo.

Now that he was fairly astride the black, how-

ever, he knew that it would have taken a good deal to have made him part with either the greenbacks or the horse. The obnoxious scenes of the night had vanished with the rising sun, and he was prepared to meet the man and stand his ground. He made sure that his pistols were secure in their holsters, and that the magazine of his rifle was filled. "If Cabrillo seems surprised at my being so well armed," he soliloquized, "I shall say that I came prepared to take a shot at the gray wolf I saw yesterday."

As the boy rode on down the bank, he could now and then hear the cries of his friends as they followed the flying pack, and he resolved that the next time they started for the ranges he would be with them. They had awakened him before day-break, but as he had decided not to join them in their morning's coursing, all their entreaties had been unavailing.

Harry had not waited long in the clearing before the man appeared upon the pony, smiling pleasantly as he dismounted.

"On time, I see," said Harry, casting his eye over the horse and rider; "and now we'll soon settle up."

With this remark he whipped out the greenbacks he had taken from his trunk at the lodge, and handed them to the man, who counted them in a

twinkling, finally ending by saying: "That's right, an even hundred. Now, that's the way I like to do business. The boys said at the camp I'd never see a cent of the 'dough,' but I knowed I would, and I have." He laughed heartily at this, slapping his pocket and sending great, triumphant clouds of smoke upward. This put Harry perfectly at his ease, for he had feared that the outlaw would prove unreasonable in his demands, and he fully realized that one sure, sharp move at such close quarters would place him at the robber's mercy. But José had other plans, and for that day, at least, the lad was not to be molested; for while the man smoked, he examined the boy's rifle and belt, expressing unbounded admiration at the neat leather holsters which held the pistols and hunting knife, together with a supply of cartridges.

"Yes," said Harry, thinking it best to explain the appearance of so many weapons of defence, "I strapped these about me, hoping to see the wolf I met yesterday in a glade just above."

"A gray feller?"

"He was gray and very large, I tell you."

"Then you'll need powder and lead, that's a fact, for they'll stand a deal of hitting."

They talked a while longer; then Harry mounted and was about to leave with the horses, when he turned and asked the black's name.

"Oh, I forgot!" replied the outlaw. "It's Prince — Prince Royal; yes, that's it, Prince Royal, though I dubbed him Tom when I got him."

"Prince Royal!" thought Harry as he rode along, "a very appropriate name indeed. And now, Prince, if you'll ford the stream right here, I'll tie you in the shade of that little oak, and we'll try a shot at our friend of yesterday."

Horse, pony, and rider were soon across, and while the boy fastened the animals to a friendly limb, he inwardly reproached himself for the injustice he had done his strange acquaintance in thinking of him as an outlaw and a robber. The man might be a bit wild, perhaps, but he had certainly done just as he had agreed to do, and the lad in consequence was in excellent spirits as he unslung his rifle and started through the woods.

With a quick, noiseless step he moved upon the isolated glade he had entered the day before, determined if possible to get a fair shot. Owing to a gentle westerly wind, he thought it best not to approach through the timber, and began to climb the steep ledge that bordered the clearing upon the north. Some of the rocks were loose, affording poor footing, and before he had climbed half way to the summit, he was obliged to sink upon his hands and knees, pushing his rifle before him. With the greatest caution the ascent was completed and the rifle cocked. It

was not at all unlikely, he thought, that the wolf would be in the glade watching the many trails that led to the spring where he had met the man the day before. The water there was cool, and in all probability it was frequently visited in warm weather by many animals, which would naturally pass through the timber in order to reach it; for he had chosen the best possible ascent on that side, and had rested several times before reaching the top.

As Harry lay there panting like a man on a mountain side, he was startled by a wild scream, and looking over the ledge, was greatly surprised at not seeing a living thing of any description. As the screech died away, the disturbed cries of mocking-birds and bluejays rent the air, and then all was silence again. It was almost impossible to locate the scream of the wildcat, for such the animal undoubtedly was, so Harry arose and looked about him, in the hope of provoking another cry. He was unsuccessful in this, but what he saw in the winding creek far below proved of untold value to one of his friends in particular, as well as to the other members of the Greyhound Club, individually and collectively, and thoroughly confirmed, in his mind, the hostler's opinion of José Cabrillo.

As Harry stood up to get a better view of the glade and to determine the position of the wildcat, he gradually turned to the right, towards the woods, and

then unconsciously his eyes followed the stream until they caught sight of a distant horseman riding in the bed of the creek. To the average young sportsman, even in a country as little inhabited as that about Deer Lodge, the appearance of a horseman riding in the bed of a stream would have made no impression whatever. One who did not stop to think would naturally suppose that the man wished to avoid the timber and brush, which from Harry's position looked almost impenetrable. But the lad knew that in any unfrequented country, along the banks of every large stream, there are always trails large enough to serve as bridle-paths. Then, too, his eyes told him that the man was not riding a pony, and he recognized the unmistakable black sombrero Cabrillo wore.

"He's covering up his trail, I'm certain," said Harry, "and he's got another fine horse." As he finished the soliloquy, he was surprised to see the man dismount in midstream, taking the lariat from the saddle-horn as he did so. While the distance was too great to make each movement plain to the eager watcher, nevertheless Harry made out that the robber had fastened one end of the rope to a heavy limb, and with the other had returned to the middle of the stream, which seemed to be more shallow than nearer the bank, where the bandit had sunk to his waist. Winding the lariat about his right arm a couple of times, the outlaw pulled back until the

limb was seen to move, and then, to Harry's great surprise, the horse moved forward and disappeared of his own accord; and the limb, as the man slackened the rope, swung back into position.

"A very clever bit of work, Mr. José Cabrillo!" said Harry to himself, "and just in the right spot—a thickly-wooded bank, and a sharp turn or two in the stream, is just the place for such a blind."

Now that the lad had discovered the outlaws' retreat, for he was certain their camp could not be far off, and was probably among the towering crags to the left of the creek, he was not so sure that the purchase of Prince Royal had been judicious. Then, on the other hand, he remembered that Cabrillo had told him that they were forced to hide from the Indian marshals, and he finally decided not to mention what he had seen. While it was not pleasant to think that a band of outlaws was camping not four miles from the lodge, it was less pleasant to look forward to hostilities, and he knew it would be useless to attempt to "beard the lion in his den." So he wisely concluded, as the outlaw crept under the trees out of sight, to forget him and his followers entirely.

Harry worked his way down into the open, following a path that led under the trees to the right. It was quite dark there, and it would have been difficult to have bagged half a dozen of the many

squirrels that chattered among the branches. But Harry was not looking for squirrels just then, and, although he saw tracks that must have been made by the wildcat, he saw nothing of the animal. After a fruitless hunt of the crags at the south side, he returned for his horse and pony. He mounted Prince Royal and led the pony as before, at a good brisk pace, hoping to reach the lodge in time for the mid-day meal. In order to reach the west bank, it was necessary to again ford the creek, and Harry accordingly turned the horses at a suitable place.

Great oak trees had become intertwined on the opposite side, through which occasional trails were seen to make their way. Towards one of these, that led gradually from the water's edge, Harry guided Prince Royal. The lad felt very well pleased over the incidents of the morning, and while endeavoring to forget the bad impression he had formed of Cabrillo, a fierce, a wildly penetrating screech sent the cold chills coursing through him. He realized at once that the wildcat was not a great way off, and that his rifle was slung across his back. His first move, therefore, was to place a trembling hand upon his pistol. The woods were black and forbidding, and the closeness of the wild grapevine and other foliage to the trail made them seem even more so. It was certainly a bad spot for so unexpected an encounter, and the boy hastily determined to take no



HARRY HEARS THE WILDCAT.



part in it, if possible. The cry had come from above and close in the rear, and while the lad was moving off, it was repeated once, twice, with terrible fierceness, followed by the unmistakable sound of the animal running on a branch. It was very faint, but its meaning was thoroughly and instantly comprehended by Prince Royal, who reared and plunged under the light rein in a well-nigh uncontrollable manner, for Harry had drawn his pistol with his right hand; and, to make matters worse, when the cry sounded nearer and fiercer, horse and pony started to shy off the trail to the left. The next instant there came another wild scream, followed by a dark object plunging through the air, and a violent whipping about of the steeds; the low, irregular oak branches caught the boy about the waist and hurled him to the ground. At the same moment the wildcat landed with terrible force upon the pony, which was nearest, and opened a two-foot gash with one stroke of its claw. Prince Royal had become entangled in a network of low branches and wild grapevine, and his frantic plunges only made his position worse. The groans of the poor pony were agonizing to hear, for the wildcat had sunk its claws into his coat for a foothold. After striking the limb, Harry dropped the revolver in his violent fall. As he struck the ground, he reached and grasped it, whipping out his knife with his left hand. Once,

twice, thrice, he fired at the animal's head; at the third shot, the animal crouched as if to spring, and the lad instinctively dropped the smoking pistol and took the knife in his right hand, as the wildcat sprang at him with a cry of pain. The lad, realizing his great peril, struck at the beast savagely again and again, using the weapon more as a broadsword than as a dagger. Twice the swift, sure blade drew blood before the claws reached him, but when they did he felt the warm blood spurt from his left arm. Then they went down together, and over and over they rolled until they struck the water with a loud splash and churned it into foam. Harry knew that he had wounded the animal with his pistol and knife, and it was hard to realize that so much activity and life still remained in that small body. With wonderfully swift movements, the beast endeavored to reach him with his hind feet, but the boy was too quick, and slashed to right and left until a good opportunity presented itself; then the streaming blade was once more raised and driven home with telling force.

As the wildcat ceased its death struggle and lay upon the water, Harry waded to the shore, where he lay panting and trembling. He fully realized that he had come out of a very serious affair with a couple of slight wounds, as he chose to regard them, and that he had been the hero of a thrilling encounter. He felt faint from the loss of blood, and

from the excitement of the battle, and it was with difficulty that he finally managed to disentangle the horses and sling the wildcat in front of him on Prince Royal. He knew that it was best to return to the lodge at once, for the pony needed attention, and Prince Royal had cut himself among the branches; so much so, in fact, that the lad was compelled to inwardly acknowledge that he limped perceptibly. The boy would never have given a second thought to his own wounds if his attention had not been drawn to them by the trickling of blood down his left arm, and then he halted only long enough to wind his sash about it. Prince Royal and the pony were both very excitable and nervous, and it was no easy task for the lad to keep his seat; for at each rustling in the branches, or the running of a squirrel from limb to limb, they would rear and plunge wildly.

Harry felt highly elated over his victory, and decided to mount the animal in the crouching attitude he had taken upon the pony's back, and to present it to the club.

As for Pietro, he had worried ever since Harry's departure, and had sat in the stable door and smoked, watching the ridge constantly. As the lad came in sight, the hostler's keen eyes detected the wildcat, and when he saw the boy's tattered garments and bloody face, and the badly mutilated and dripping animal, his astonishment was unbounded.

"Well, if you ain't gone and knifed a panther-cat!" he exclaimed, calling to Tony to come out and have a look at the beast. Of course, Harry had to relate the events of the morning as he remembered them, after which the hostler and cook expressed themselves as very proud of the young hunter, and as a penalty for it all, ordered him to his bunk, while Tony went to prepare an over-tempting morsel for our hero. Harry was quite willing to accept the sentence, for the fight, coupled with the broken dreams of the bandit the previous night, had left him worn out. He bathed his face and arms in cool water, while Tony and Pietro bandaged the wounds, which were more serious than the lad at first supposed. They then left him, after he had swallowed Tony's lunch, for a good rest. Here we shall leave him for the present, and return to the other members of the club, who had started for the prairie long before sunrise, followed by the entire pack.



CHAPTER IV

WITH THE GREYHOUNDS



THOUGH the boys had been unsuccessful in their efforts to prevail upon Harry to accompany them with his new mount, Arthur had managed to coax Diamond away from his master, thus completing the pack. As the ponies cantered along in the damp wind that blew up from the gray stream below, Arthur repeated the reasons his brother had given him for not joining the members in their morning gallop, ending by saying:—

“It’s easy to see he’s agreed to pay for his horse to-day, fellows ; and I sincerely hope the man is all right. I advised him not to ride his purchase back, but Pietro seems to think it’s better to lose the horse now and have it over with.”

“It would be a pity to have to part with him, and it would spoil Harry’s summer,” remarked Paul.

"Oh, he'll come out of it with flying colors!" continued Eugene, cheerfully. "Do you remember our last foot-ball game with Brookdale, with three minutes to play and seventy yards to make? Well, it's my opinion that any fellow who can move as Harry moved on that occasion is able to defend himself anywhere; and, furthermore, I think Pietro feels that Colonel Hillman has selected him from the many herdsman as best suited to keep an eye on us this summer, and is consequently in a position to view everything seriously." We have seen that Eugene's opinions of Harry were just, for if he had not possessed wonderful strength and activity, he would probably have been worsted in his morning's encounter.

Eugene's speech had the desired effect, for the boys were soon galloping at a merry pace, occasionally testing their mounts in a dash of a furlong or two. The gray mustang owned by Eugene seemed to be the fastest of the ponies, and Osage Chief, as the lad called him, was certainly improving under Pietro's attention and his master's light seat. In fact, Osage Chief and Walter's chestnut ran neck-and-neck for a quarter mile, which naturally put Eugene in the best of spirits.

The other boys, however, were not so fortunate with their mounts. Paul's Rex did well at the start, but could not run with Osage Chief after the first furlong.

"They're not used to these short, quick dashes," said Walter, riding up to Arthur and Paul, "and will do better later on. The rancheros have used them to head an occasional steer, but, with this exception, they have had no speeding whatever."

Arthur and Paul were confident that their bronchos would develop into long-distance nags, anyway, and were satisfied with their respective choices. Jack's Blue Rocket was as fleet as he was graceful, and everything pointed to a grand season's coursing.

"Since you fellows have named your favorites, I suppose I should name mine," said Arthur. "What would you suggest?"

"Oh, I don't know!" replied Jack, glancing about at his friends. "His coat is a good deal like Tasso's, and they call him a blue greyhound. It is also spotted, so I should suggest Domino."

"Excellent!" exclaimed the club in chorus.

"Then Domino it is; though I don't suppose he'll move much like the famous racer."

"He may," was Jack's encouraging reply; "you must remember we haven't had a race yet."

"Very true; but we'll soon have one," cried Walter, riding to a hilltop and turning his field-glasses upon a distant bit of woodland.

"What is it?" asked the boys.

"A coyote; no, it's a fox, fellows, see for yourselves," replied Walter in great glee, gathering the

reins firmly in his left hand. The glasses were passed around in turn, and the boys all agreed that the animal was a fox feeding upon a jack-rabbit.



FEEDING UPON A JACK-RABBIT.

Foxes were scarce in that country, the boys had heard, and they were consequently very anxious to bring it to bag.

"He'll lead us a dance, with that start," said

Arthur, watching the dogs as they ran about in their eager search.

"We must be careful, now," cautioned Walter, placing the glasses back into the leather case. "He's just at the edge of the timber, which we shall probably have to drive to start him. Keep your eyes and ears wide open, fellows, for a fox that can catch a jack-rabbit that has been incessantly chased by coyotes is worth working for."

"Wouldn't it be well to surround the timber?" suggested Paul.

"A capital idea! Eugene, you, Arthur, and Jack call your dogs and ride in a semicircle to the other side; Paul and I will keep ahead with Tasso and Rambler. We can't possibly miss him." So the club separated and advanced; and, as the fox turned with surprising swiftness and started down the prairie, a shout of suppressed excitement broke from the boys. As the cry rose, Rambler led Tasso and the pack over the first rise. There was a dull clatter of flying hoofs as the horses closed, a series of loud shouts and encouraging words from the lads, the horses settled down to a clean, swift galloping, and the chase began in earnest. The great strides of the long-limbed dogs soon lessened the fox's start, and it was clearly evident that the coursers had been well selected and were well matched.

Tasso, to the boys' great surprise, was unable to

retain the lead in the run down the prairie, his previous experience in turning a rabbit being of little assistance in a straight race. The fleet Saxony soon went to the front, followed closely by Diana, Rambler, and Boomerang; then the lead fell to Diamond, whose running after the first half mile was superb. On and on they swept, stride for stride, until a rapidly moving line of six greyhounds and the fox shone clear against the sky. And now the fox, closely pushed, began to change his tactics and double on his trail. He would run along a ridge quite near the summit, and then, with a tremendous leap, would disappear and start back with redoubled speed on the other side. Time and time again the dogs were thrown off, until Tasso left the pack and ran the summit of the ridges, encouraged by Walter's loud shouts. This seemed to annoy the fox beyond measure, for he soon started off on a level stretch, and was finally overtaken by the dogs.

During the chase, the lads had a good opportunity of displaying their horsemanship, which was very creditable. They all rode boldly and freely, with light hands and firm seats; between the wild cries sent after the vanishing pack, they had occasionally glanced about at each other. Osage Chief ran under a tight rein in the lead, followed closely by Leveller and Domino, whose bursts of speed were astonishing. They ran pretty well bunched until the last half mile,

when Jack sent Blue Rocket to the front, and was first in at the death.

"You are no more surprised than I, fellows!" said Jack to his friends, as they dismounted to rest the horses and tighten the girths. "I wouldn't have believed it of my horse. We were all running freely, with something to spare, when he seemed to fairly fly out from the bunch, and the next second was running far in the lead."

"Which proves what I said before the race," Walter replied. "They all did well, and will do better with more riding." Walter then handed the fox's tail to Jack, who of course was entitled to it by being first in at the kill, and the boys mounted and continued the coursing.

Rabbit after rabbit was "jumped" and caught after a furious chase, usually lasting three or four minutes; and when the fifth "jack" was killed after a beautiful run of nearly two miles, the boys declared themselves satisfied with the morning's sport, and decided to return to camp. They had ridden probably six miles from the lodge, Walter said, but as the willows bordering Grouse creek were not two miles off, the thirsty horses were headed for



A MORNING'S
COURSING.

the stream. With many a light-hearted laugh, the boys allowed their impatient mounts to canter along, and they had arrived within a quarter mile of the willows, when Walter pulled up his horse so suddenly that he nearly slid out of his saddle as the animal stood on his hind legs.

"What's the matter?" asked the boys, drawing rein instantly.

"Hush! not so loud!" said Walter, laying his finger upon his lips; "see there!" As he said this, he pointed toward the group of willows, and the boys instantly saw what had attracted their friend's attention. It was the figure of a man creeping along under cover of the willows, as if stalking game. He was too distant to be seen plainly, but the boys made out that he wore a black shirt and hat, and that he was interested in something at the other side of the willows; and, judging from his movements, was pushing a gun or some heavy article in advance of him.

"He's probably trailing a deer," said Paul, after he had taken a careful look.

"I don't believe he's hunting," replied Walter, confidently, "for deer don't frequent the vicinity of camp-fires."

Skilled as most of the boys were in woodcraft, they were forced to confess that they had not detected the thin line of faint smoke that arose from the willows, and were willing to admit that Walter's

view of the situation was the correct one, that the man was not deer-stalking, and was endeavoring to creep upon the camper unobserved. So earnest was he in his occupation, that he never turned his head to right nor left, but kept bobbing up and down as he paused long enough to take a good view of the camp-fire.

"Who do you suppose he is, and what is he about?" asked Eugene, excitedly.

"I may be wrong, boys," Walter replied, "but I am of the opinion that that man has something unpleasant to say to the person or persons by the camp-fire, and I should not be surprised to find we are intimately acquainted with the camper."

"Then you think it's Harry?" inquired Arthur, now thoroughly aroused. "Perhaps that's the man he's agreed to pay the money to. Come on, fellows!" he said, placing his foot into the stirrup.

"No, no!" hastily interposed Walter. "That's only a theory. Too many of us are sure to be seen. Let the others remain here out of sight with the horses and dogs, Arthur, and you and I will creep up and see for ourselves."

This arrangement was thoroughly satisfactory, and after Eugene had tied the dogs with a thong he had taken from his saddle, Arthur and Walter started for the willows, moving rapidly and keeping to the low land.

The man had by this time come within fifty feet of the stripe of smoke, and it was evident that he was to go no further, for he lay behind a fallen log with the barrel of his rifle protruding over it. The boys moved swiftly through the tall grass and between the rocks behind him, and then crept cautiously forward and secreted themselves behind some friendly bowlders not twenty yards off, in sight of their friends, who watched them anxiously.

The willows and bushes grew too thick to make objects on the other side very plain, though at odd moments the boys caught a glimpse of a figure in buckskin, who seemed to be busying himself about the fire. They saw that it was not Harry, and consequently felt greatly relieved. They were none the less interested in the movements of both men, however, and were beginning to grow impatient, when one of the most memorable conversations to which they had ever listened was opened by the man behind the log emitting three short, sharp, clear whistles, like the call of a quail.

The man at the fire evidently understood, for, instead of appearing at an opening in the trees with his gun, he came and stood in sight, whistling four times in reply.

"Well, who is it?" he growled, crouching and endeavoring to see through the shrubbery. "Come out; or are you a coward?"

"That's it, Wild Face, a coward, — him that you knifed a month since, — come for the price of the black, that you sold to that there 'tenderfoot' this mornin'!"

"Jim, by the powers! I'm glad to see you again, Jim."

"Not by no means, you ain't. That was my nag you sold, and I want the price, and no more of this business, cap'n. I'm done!"

"I heard you was," continued the other, quite unconcerned, coming nearer; "I heard you was a-punchin' cattle, and had quit us, and was leadin' a dog's life."

"Dog's life!" repeated the man Cabrillo had called Jim, "dog's life, indeed! Yer a-follerin' a dog's life, Wild Face, and I want no more of it. I've larnt the lockstep, have worn stripes, and have seed a sight o' times, since I lost this headlight!" he concluded, holding his left hand up to his face.

Then followed a volley of oaths by the chief, who had become greatly infuriated over Jim's last speech. "And who's to blame, you fool?" he managed to gasp at last. "Put down that gun and come and have a talk. How could I handle a lot of chicken-hearted loafers, I'd like to know? Give it up, Jim, and come along of us. There won't be no engine-ridin', nor rail-pullin', Jim, and you can lay to that."

"How many of the boys has gone?"

"Only Snaky and Micky, and they'll be back afore long."

"How are you goin' to live? Safe crackin'?"

"Not much, Jim. Stick to me, and you'll not regret it, Jim. We'll have fast hosses to ride, and pickles and fishes that come in little tin boxes, to eat, and these here scatter guns that don't have no trigger to get caught in the brush, to shoot with."

"Has these city chaps all those things, cap'n?" said the other, rising to his feet and waiting for his chief to come up. "I didn't like the job afore you spoke, but now I'll shake."

"And forget the old score, Jim?"

"Yes, forget the old score; though I still lay to it, that you shouldn't have knifed me, mate."

They stood up together, Cabrillo young, straight, and dark, while the man called Jim was round-shouldered, and was minus his left eye. The boys watched them intently as they shook hands, and when the outlaws had disappeared through the trees toward the fire, they scrambled to their feet and ran to their friends, who were naturally utterly at a loss to account for the strange actions of the two men. They were not to remain long in the dark, however, for Walter and Arthur had soon related all they had heard, and it is needless to say their words created great consternation.

"There goes our summer vacation, higher than a kite!" indignantly exclaimed Eugene, mounting Osage Chief. "I felt it would lead to that last night when I saw Harry on the black."

"And they mean to enjoy all our canned goods, too, do they?" said Paul, with a determined look in his eyes. "We'll see about that!"

"And are even counting on owning our shot-guns and horses." added Jack. "I never heard of anything more preposterous!"

"Don't borrow trouble, fellows," said Walter, who naturally felt the presence of the bandits more than his friends. "These fellows are undoubtedly a set of desperate men, who would rather steal than work, and they have been given the credit of a number of train robberies. But I am certain, when they find out that we are able to defend ourselves, that they will not trouble us."

"Well, I'm glad Harry is back safe and sound," said Arthur, "for this man seemed to know that this fellow Cabrillo had received the money for his horse."

The boys then galloped along in silence until they were within fifty feet of the lodge, when Pietro burst out upon the veranda, dragging the wildcat after him.

"See here, my hearties!" cried the ranchero, "how's this for a morning's hunt? What have you got, you say, Master Walter? A fox and a half-

dozen 'jacks'? Not so bad, but I believe Master Harry's the flower of the flock to-day!"

"You don't mean to say that he shot that this morning?" asked Arthur, gazing in astonishment at the blood-stained animal. "Was he hurt?"

"Yes, he did shoot it, single handed; and he seems as cool about it as though it happened back there where he lives every day. He was scratched considerable, so Tony and I got him to turn in."

The boys were off their horses in an instant, and were soon hearing the story from Harry's lips as we have attempted to describe it in the previous chapter. They listened attentively, now and then uttering an exclamation of surprise and admiration at their friend's coolness and courage.

"Didn't it make your blood run cold when you heard the first cry?" asked Paul, nervously.

"Yes, I suppose it did; but then there wasn't time to think of that, and I don't believe I could ever move so fast again," replied Harry, modestly, leaning upon his elbow. "It was a fortunate escape, as I could not get at my rifle, so quickly did the animal move. But what is on your minds that makes you look so white?"

Then Walter related all that took place between the bandits, to which Pietro listened closely. When Walter had finished, the hostler said in a husky voice: "Now, Master Walter, I believe this country,

large as it is, is too small for you and your friends, and I'm goin' to tell your uncle so. It's no use tryin' to beat those villains at their own game, and they're the meanest lot I ever heard of."

The boys would not hear of Pietro sending word to Uncle John, and forced him to promise that he would not, which he did reluctantly, saying that he knew that there would be trouble. The boys finally agreed that they would not leave the lodge separately, and would not, for some time at least, camp on the prairie over night. This seemed to satisfy the herdsman, for he admired the stand the lads had taken, and realized that they were quite able to look after themselves. Pietro soon after returned to the tired horses, while the lads did full justice to a hearty lunch.

That afternoon was spent in a general cleaning up of pistols and rifles, for the boys instinctively felt that trouble was brewing, and were determined to stand their ground, in case of an attack. They looked everything over affectionately, for their possessions had grown dearer since they had learned that the outlaws were determined to steal them. After supper, the time was spent in paddling up and down stream a short distance from camp, or in a shot or two over the setters, which had been confined in the stable all day, and were consequently very willing participants in the sport.

As it grew dark, the canoes were once more fastened to the jetty, a brace of quails was left in the kitchen, and a very tired lot of boys tumbled into their respective bunks.

While they are sleeping soundly after their long ride, or dreaming, perhaps, of thrilling encounters with José Cabrillo's band of outlaws, let us see what took place between that worthy and his comrade, after they had shaken hands, and had returned to the fire.



CHAPTER V

THE OUTLAWS' RETREAT

"WELL, well, cap'n, I see you're the same old dandy!" ejaculated Jim, as he glanced at the chief's saddle and rifle, which lay upon the grass close to the camp-fire. "And you've got a good un to ride, too," he concluded, as he caught sight of a handsome bright bay that had the free run of a lariat's length.

"Yes, Jim, I manage to look pretty well, even if business has been droppin' off," replied the chief, lighting a yellow-covered cigarette in the flame; "and it's all due to that gang of cowards we had with us last winter, — not includin' you, Jim, not by no means."

"Then, what for did you try to end my jig, after it was fiddled?" demanded Jim, turning the brace of squirrels upon the coals, and looking at Cabrillo as if he had half a mind not to forget the old score. "I stuck to the engine under orders, and you know it, cap'n."

"I know it, Jim, and I'm sorry. I've lived rough,

and when things don't go to suit me, I raise Cain. When I got back, and heard that those pups had missed the express car, I could have killed 'em all," replied Cabrillo, scowling fiercely at the fire.

"Well, they did die, two on 'em, in their tracks," Jim said slowly, "and they wasn't bad fellers, neither."

"Let's forget it, Jim. They weren't made for this business, nohow."

"'Tain't no means likely I'll forget, cap'n," answered the other, rolling up his ragged sleeve and displaying a livid streak across his arm. "I reckon this'll remind me."

"Let it, then," growled the chief, not deigning to look up; "and remember, the next time we come to splitting the night's work, don't have nothing to say!"

"Not I."

"How did you know I sold your nag this mornin'?" asked the other, with an amused grin. "Did Micky tell you?"

"Yes, 'twas Micky. He said you was wearin' shiny black boots and silver spurs, and had a keg under lock and key all the while, and that he was goin' to quit before he swung for it."

"He did, did he?" shouted the enraged bandit, jumping up and stamping upon his sombrero. "And why wouldn't I? I know the business from night-ridin' to rail-pullin', and I want to look like a gentle-

man, and quit some day with roll enough to ride in a carriage, and spend ten thousand a year."

Jim had heard the same story many times before.

"What's the next move?" he asked.

"Why, to strip that there shootin' camp from top to bottom, and get hold of some of those pistols, and all we can tote away. The young fellers is likely lookin' enough, and must have a bit of money with 'em."

"Yes, and Micky said they had a whole string of hounds, that were keener than so many razors."

"Well, what of it? We're not dealin' with marshals and soldiers, but with a bunch of school-boys. I really believe, Jim, you've lost your nerve, since that last hold-up," replied the chief, punching his comrade in the ribs. "Jim, you and I have seen some hard knocks, but I'll allow we can't pull out for a bunch of striplings;" and he laughed heartily.

This seemed to be quite enough for the one-eyed man, who declared himself perfectly willing to begin operations at once.

"We'll go back and see the boys," said the chief, saddling his horse, "and have a chat and smoke." The two men then mounted, and the horse started up the stream.

If the members of the Greyhound Club could have heard the foregoing conversation, it is doubtful if they would have remained another day at Deer

Lodge. The men were undoubtedly a wild and reckless set, and would not hesitate for an instant to end a life. They had evidently been foiled in a train robbery a month or two previous, much to the chief's disappointment, and had been forced to remain in hiding.

The chief struck the bay with his spurs, and they rode at a brisk gallop until they turned into a trail that led to a ford. They again turned at right angles, this time following the bed of the stream, until they had reached the spot where Harry had seen Cabrillo dismount that same morning.

Jim was knee-deep at once, winding a lariat about a limb as the chief had done in the morning. Horse and rider then disappeared, and, when Jim had wound the lasso about his waist and followed, there was scarcely a broken twig left behind to mark the trail.

This time, as the path to the summit of the towering cliff was steep and rough, Jim did not mount, but followed his chief up the bed of a sparkling spring. Great boulders seemed to jut out into the brook at every twenty feet, around which the bay moved cleverly. A heavy growth of oak trees almost hid the blue sky, and the patches of sunlight that penetrated the thickly leaved branches were few and far between. After a long climb, during which the spring had narrowed to a tiny silver thread that

gushed out from a mass of rocks, Cabrillo dismounted and gave a short, clear whistle, unfastening his saddle-girth as he did so. A great oak door, built into the rocks, was opened almost at once by a heavily bearded man, who seemed a little surprised at seeing Jim with the chief.

Cabrillo had selected a natural fortress for his retreat. A wall of granite, ten or twelve feet high, completely shut it off from the outside world, except where the door had been built in, and where a few rocks had been rolled into a crevice or two. Moreover, it was on the highest point of a very high cliff, and a splendid view of the rolling prairie could be had for miles around. Great oaks and elms intertwined their branches above, casting a welcome shade at all hours.

Cabrillo, as we have seen, had an eye for the comforts and luxuries of life, and was not content to live as most of his band would have been willing to. He had erected a substantial log-house against the stone barricade, roomy enough for a dozen bunks and a fireplace.

As the chief entered, three or four men, who had been sleeping on their blankets in the shade, rose to a sitting posture, greeting their chief with a lazy "Howdy, cap'n?" or exchanging nods with Jim.

Cabrillo's horse, being free of his bridle, neighed shrilly as he trotted to a corral at the further end of

the enclosure, where other fleet, clean-limbed animals were quartered.

Saddles and bridles lay in profusion about on the grass, and there were rifles, and belts holding pistols and knives, all ready to be caught up at a moment's notice. A great piece of meat hung from a limb close by, while six or eight steaks sputtered on the coals of a blazing camp-fire. The black-bearded man, after he had drawn an iron bar across the door, returned to the fire and turned the steaks a few times, after which he placed them upon a hewn log one after the other. The men needed no invitation to fall to, for before the last steak had reached the log which served as a table, they had whipped out their knives and were eating heartily. They looked the wild, reckless men they were, who, either from choice or the force of circumstances, had led roving, dishonest lives from boyhood.

The interior of their retreat was not unlike Deer Lodge. A spacious hearth had been built into one end, around which a couple of stools stood. There were windows, too, but they were heavily barred, and had shutters which were three inches thick.

Instead of the pleasing scenes of sporting life that lined the walls of the boys' camp, there were wooden pins in irregular rows, upon which were hung sombreros, Mexican trousers, and buckskin suits. The names of the members of the gang had been burned

above each peg, and there were other decorations such as a man might make with a hot iron for idleness or occupation. The first wooden nail held a Mexican waist trimmed with gold lace, a gaudy red sash, and a pair of well-worn buckskin trousers. Over this the words "Cabrillo, his peg" were burned clearly, and then, a little further down, "José, Wild Face," with a sketch of the chief's dark face, not bad, you would say, but considerably out of drawing. Above the remaining pegs were the words "Snaky," "Jim," "Dobson, he Bit the dust," and there was nothing hanging from this pin; "Tarcedo," "Fire-fly," "Micky," and "Redwood" completed the list.

Upon a rough table in the centre of the room were a bottle of ink, a quill pen, and a bundle of papers. The papers bore undisputed evidence of the many raids Cabrillo's men had been engaged in. They had been laid aside as useless property, evidently, for there were diagrams of roads and cross-ways upon countless letters, magazines, etc., that had never arrived at their respective destinations. A mail-bag, marked "U. S. Mail," had been slashed with a sharp knife, and lay, emptied of its contents, upon the earth floor. A pleasant odor of pine needles came from the bunks, which had been built into the retreat, six on either side.

"'Tain't much longer you'll have to stand such grub, boys, and you can lay to it," said Cabrillo,

lighting a cigarette as he sat watching his men with his back against a tree; "for we'll put enough by from that there fancy log-house to bring us to next fall. And then, when the right night comes, we'll have another go at the express, say I, and then I'm done."

"What'll we do then, captain, — starve?" asked Redwood.

"Starve, if you like, you fools!" answered the chief, derisively. "There isn't one among you with money enough to get a rig of store clothes, not one. You've risked swinging, and you've worked hard, these three past years, and what for? It's many a time I told you the same tale, when I counted you out hundreds, men, hundreds, after a night's ride. But it wasn't no use. To town for a good time, and back in your shirts, a-beggin' a brace of pistols. But they're closin' in on us, and I'm done. Micky got out as slick as a hound's teeth this mornin', when I was gone up stream, but it won't happen again. I want none of you leavin' and blowin' the whole go, and I won't have it!" he concluded, sending a great gray column of smoke among the branches. "I've done the straight thing with you, and have never held out more than a gallon of whiskey, by reason of earnin' it. And, bein' as there's a drop still in the keg, I propose we have it out."

This put the men in good spirits, and they very

soon forgot their chief's words. He had told them that he was through with them all so often before, especially when the raids had not panned out to his expectations, that the story was no new one. Young as Cabrillo was, he possessed the strength of mind to head that notorious band successfully, and his name is to this day spoken of with awe in that unfrequented region where lawlessness is prevalent.

Redwood caught the key Cabrillo tossed him, and disappeared into the retreat, reappearing at once with a small brown keg and tin dipper. The men drank eagerly all that was allowed them, and then filled their pipes and waited for the chief to begin, for they knew from experience that the extra allowance of whiskey would be followed by plans for another raid or hold-up.

"Now, men," began Cabrillo, after he had lighted his second cigarette, "although Micky did give us the go-by this mornin', I forgot to say that Snaky did not, an' that he's out on business in your interests. Jim, here, wants no part in the job, but I'll allow he'll join us, won't you, Jim?"

Jim made no reply.

"Where'll it be?" asked the man called Firefly.

"At the second tank from the Border City, the other side of the river, like this," the chief replied, sketching with a twig, upon the beaten earth, a diagram of the trails that led to the railroad, and mark-

ing with a cross the position of the water tank. "Snaky wears a black beard and a red tie, and rides in the first car," he concluded, puffing nervously at his cigarette. "I see it's cloudin' up, and we'll not have a better night six months from now."

"Be you goin' to quit us then?" asked Tarcedo, with a grim smile, stroking his great black beard.

"Don't know, Dody," answered the other; "it depends upon yourselves. If you can show me a good, clean, profitable job, and a steady hand, I'll linger with you a while longer. If you don't, back to the states I go, and an end of it! I can't see how we missed the halter that last go, for the life of me! You can thank the drivin' rain and the black night for it. But to-night we'll make an even half-dozen gentlemen; six is bunch enough for any train, say I, and not too many when it comes to splittin' the dust. And will you tell me you're for layin' to, here, like a blessed canal-boat, and let those express cars go by us with their fortunes, night after night? Not you! As sure as day breaks to-morrow, we'll be here, the whole band, breakin' open those yellow packages, with their red seals and greenbacks, the kind that Holton and Perkins used to fetch and count out before me, when I was just a youngster at the game. He was the dandy, was Holton, and feared nothin' on two or four legs."

Cabrillo ran on until he knew he had produced the

desired effect upon his band, and then, taking the keg of whiskey, arose and entered the retreat. He placed the keg under lock and key, after which he examined each letter and paper that lay upon the table and floor. These he threw upon the hearth, one after the other, and lighted them, placing the mail-bag in a box that contained other pieces of leather, from which the outlaws made their bridles and holsters, and mended their saddles.

When he appeared again before his men, he carried his rifle and pistols, which he started to clean in a most thorough manner, and they followed his example with their weapons. Thus the afternoon wore away. Towards evening the chief climbed the boulders that surrounded the retreat.

"If they build any more of those fancy log-houses with the wide shelters," he called down to his men, "we won't be able to camp around here. They're paddlin' up and down Grouse in one of those cloth dug-outs, and like as not they'll find our trail before the summer's gone. We'll give 'em a scare in a week or two that'll fix 'em."

The fact was, the boys were already scared, and scared badly. They had spent that very afternoon in cleaning and repairing their pistols, and were that very moment, with Cabrillo's keen eyes upon them, discussing the probable outcome of an encounter with the fearless bandit and his tribe.

They little guessed that a series of thrilling events would result in their capturing José Cabrillo and his entire band, and in the restoration of a large sum of money and other valuables to the rightful owners.

The outlaw saw nothing else to interest him, evidently, for, after watching for a while longer, he descended, without a remark, as the shades of night began to envelop the landscape.

Tarcedo, or Dody, as he was called, soon had the fire rekindled, and a dozen steaks were soon after broiling on the coals. After supper, each man fed and watered his horse at the spring, and then examined his bridle, saddle, and rifle for the last time. The wind blew up cold and damp from the south, and the sky became overcast. The men stood patiently awaiting the word to saddle, which was finally given them.

"Steady, now!" exclaimed Cabrillo, as he glanced at his band in the light of the camp-fire, "and let's have no noise. Jim, are you steady?"

"Ay, ay, cap'n!" answered the man, as he mounted with his comrades.

"Then we're off. Firefly, give me your bridle and throw the bar back."

The great oak door swung open, Cabrillo's horse stepped out into the trail, and the rest followed. There was scarcely a sound. The horses seemed to know the path perfectly, though the night was very

dark. When the band reached the foot of the cliff and had entered the stream, they moved slowly and carefully, watching the banks for a possible camp-fire. The main trail was finally struck after innumerable crossings and turns, and pipes were lighted.

They rode through the damp air half the night, finally entering a dense growth of jack-oaks that bordered the banks of a river. Here they dismounted and fastened their horses. The wind increased in violence and the clouds grew blacker. This was followed by a clap of thunder that fairly shook the earth, and the rain came down in torrents. Now and then a flash of lightning brightened the sky and lit up the ruddy-indigo surface of the sweeping river, and then the night seemed even more forbidding by contrast.

"The right kind of a night for this black business," said Jim, as the men started through the trees. "I hope we'll come out with whole pelts."

"Shut up, you fool!" cried Cabrillo, with a volley of terrible oaths, "and let me hear no more such talk, or you'll regret it. I want no coyotes in this crowd."

"That's no go, now, Jim," replied Redwood. "Hold the cap'n up. No one can't see to hit a hillside to-night."

The outlaws worked their way out from among the trees, and stepped upon the track. Here they

halted, and Cabrillo gave his final orders, vowing fearful vengeance on those who failed to obey to the very letter. They took up the march again in silence, crossing the great dark bridge.

"Get under the tank out of the blow," said the chief, as they came up to the water tower, "for it may be an hour or so before she sounds."

The men gathered under the dripping tank and lighted their pipes. Cabrillo climbed the ladder and stood watching the rails. The wind and rain lashed him unmercifully, but he clung to his post with a faithfulness that merited a better cause. It was fortunate for him that he did so, for, as he glanced across the river where the horses were picketed, his keen eyes told him that a man had left the track, and was making his way towards the oaks. The person carried a lantern, which he held above his head, and Cabrillo knew the man had heard the horses neighing.

He looked once more in the direction of Border City, and then descended quickly, and ordered Fire-fly to stand guard.

"Come with me, Redwood; there's a track-walker goin' to examine the nags," he said, "and we'd better get him out of the way."

They crossed the bridge again, and then separated. The light kept bobbing about the trees, and it was no trouble to creep upon it unobserved.

"I say, my man, what can we do for you?" called Cabrillo from the darkness.

"Oh, nothing! I thought somebody's horses had—" he replied, and that was all he said. He fell like a log as Redwood's sure blow struck him, and the next moment they left him securely bound and gagged.

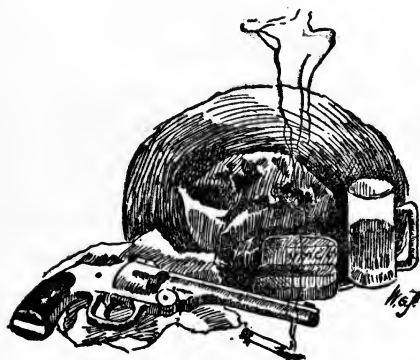
"We'll have no more interruptions, I hope," said the chief, endeavoring to light a cigarette, "for there she comes."

Faint and far off as the whistle was, Cabrillo heard it, and lost no time in recrossing the bridge. Redwood, Tarcedo, and Jim took their positions among the bushes, car lengths apart, Firefly remaining at the tank with Cabrillo.

The low rumble of the train grew more distinct, and was followed by a series of piercing whistles that sounded high above the wind and rain. Then the great glaring headlight appeared far down the track, and the rails glittered and sparkled as the yellow shine fell upon them. The pale yellow glare grew nearer, the lights in the car windows defined themselves clearly, and the magnificent steel engine, puffing and blowing, came to a stand at the tower. The next instant a fusillade of shots filled the air, followed by the wild screams of the passengers.

"Hands up!" cried Cabrillo and Firefly, boarding

the engine from opposite sides. The command was instantly obeyed, and the outlaws had possession of the train.



CHAPTER VI

THE HOLD-UP

TOM CLARK was the engineer of the Dallas express, which left Border City at nine each evening. He stood by his favorite, oil-can in hand, watching the throng upon the platform, or exchanging greetings with his many friends. There was an air of bustle and commotion about the station that night that was very pleasing to the tried old engineer. If he had known that José Cabrillo and his notorious band were even then starting upon their forty-mile ride on purpose to hold up his train, it is safe to say he would not have enjoyed the scene of activity before him; but he knew nothing of José's plans, and was content to watch and compare the different types he knew so well. The many loungers stood as usual with their backs to the rail, as poor and as ragged as they were six months before. He recognized the shouts of the cabmen, and the stentorian tones of the hotel men, each of whom proclaimed that his hostelry was the only first-class house in Border City. There were many among the crowd, though, that

Tom did not recognize: the Indian with the gaudy red blanket, for instance, or the desperate-looking man wearing the heavy black beard and red scarf, who looked at everything about the train so furtively. The engineer glanced through the windows of the dining-room and saw there were a goodly number of passengers for Dallas, which, in addition to those who thronged the lunch counter, would make a full train. He watched the sloping street until his eyes rested upon a little figure in white, and then he smiled happily.

"Did you think I wasn't coming, father?" asked the little girl, when she had come up. "Mother was bound you'd have a good dinner, and didn't hurry."

"Well, that was very kind of her. We are a little ahead of time," he replied, holding up a silver watch to the light. "What did you bring me?"

"Oh, lots of nice things! roast chicken and pie, and something else you like."

"That's a good girl," he said, kissing her. "Now, run home, for it's going to storm."

As the girl tripped happily off, he climbed into the engine and placed the steaming pail upon the seat beside him. The fireman, Josh Larkin, heaped coal upon the hungry fire, or polished a rod here and there with an oily cloth.

"We're in for a storm to-night, or I'm no prophet,"

he began, lighting his corn-cob pipe, "and I believe we'll have trouble, too. There are more odd-looking ducks behind us to-night than I ever saw before, — fellers with white suits and red leather shoes, and women with diamonds enough to blind a man."

"Josh, you can't stand a blow and rain any more, nohow," replied the engineer. "And as for hold-ups and the like, I've been in a dozen, and have never been scratched."

"No, but you've been roped to your own engine, and have seen your fireman killed, which amounts to the same thing."

"Well, there's no cause to worry. The marshals have rounded up those 'dodgers' by this time, I'll allow."

"Not by a good deal they haven't. Those fellers shoot like pizen, and the marshals don't want no part in the play. Then, the crew is grumpy to-night, Tom. They're afraid of those night-riders, I know."

"Don't you believe they are," the other replied, placing his hand upon the throttle through force of habit. "Sanders is as good a man as ever handled a train, my boy."

The conversation continued in this strain for more than ten minutes, when it was interrupted by the appearance of the conductor himself.

"Evenin', Sanders," said the engineer, between his mouthfuls of chicken, "we were just discussin' you."

Josh, here, thinks we're in for a blow, along with some trouble."

"Good for you, Josh! I'm feelin' a bit that way myself, to-night; but I guess it's not worth worrying about. Those things don't come when you expect 'em. We'll have the blow, though, sure," he continued, taking a good look at the threatening sky. And with this he swung his lantern from his arm and walked down the platform, calling, "All aboard, going south!"

The crowd gradually began to thin. The fat lawyer who is always late had just time to purchase his ticket and light a cigar, and the train pulled out.

As the yellow and white lights of the city grew dim and then disappeared altogether, the cars moved over the ties faster and faster. Engineer and fireman sat upon opposite sides of the engine, eagerly watching the shining tracks, or endeavoring to peer into the black night. The glow from the great fire fell upon the floor of the cab and glittered upon the coals that had fallen from Larkin's shovel. Over bridges and through endless fields of corn the train swept on, until the broad plain of Oklahoma lay on either hand. Then Tom threw open the throttle still wider, and the train fairly flew through space. It had commenced to rain hard, and the men were compelled to close the glass windows at the front of the engine. The occasional flashes of lightning lit up the iron

horse, and showed for an instant every detail of the wonderful machinery. Tom and his fireman had evidently not forgotten their conversation at Border City, or the storm had put them in bad spirits, for they did not speak during the ride, but sat silent and morose, staring out into the darkness.

Among the passengers, though, things were very different. Dick Tracy, the train-boy, had sold more that day than ever before, and, as he confided to the baggage master, he thought some of the passengers must have "money to burn."

"They're the 'larkiest' lot I ever saw," he explained, placing his goods and a handful of change upon a trunk, "and I don't understand it. There's a feller in there that wears a piece of glass in his right eye, and has a man to bring him chicken sandwiches, and cut the magazines I sell him."

Those who had been fortunate enough to secure berths in the Pullman, retired soon after the train left Border City. The other passengers settled themselves as comfortably as possible, in the reclining chairs, and endeavored to lose themselves in sleep; but it was no use, for the rain beat against the window-panes incessantly, and the loud claps of thunder sounded like the roar of a hundred cannons.

There were a few women and children in the forward cars, but the greater number were either well-to-do ranchers, returning from the great Kansas City

markets, or young men from the great cities of the East, some tourists, some in search of fame and fortune in the Southwest.

"This must be the famous Oklahoma country, the home of Holton and his crowd," said a gentlemanly looking youth, lighting a cigarette and offering the case to Conductor Sanders, as they took chairs in the smoking booth. "Did they really send him to prison?"

"Yes," replied the other, "but it did no good. There were other men ready to take his place, and they have."

"You mean this young Cabrillo one reads of in the dailies?"

"The very man. He's as bad as any, and uses you much worse. Now, this is the kind of night he likes, — no moon, and lots of water to cover the trail, for they generally ride back to the hills in the creek bottoms, which are sometimes dry. But why don't you turn in?"

"I believe I will. What are we stopping for?"

"Water. . There's a tank on this side of the river," replied the conductor, as the train began to slow up.

The two arose and walked from the smoking booth to the dimly lighted chair car. The passengers had arranged themselves as comfortably as the circumstances would allow. The ranchers from Texas had thrown off their coats and shoes, and lay snoring,

with their sombreros covering their faces. The young men from the East did not seem to be able to follow this example, for they tossed about uneasily, asking numberless questions of the trainmen as they walked through the cars.

"Ah, my good fellow, is it nearly daylight?" asked the tourist of whom Dick Tracy had spoken to the baggage master as wearing "a piece of glass in his right eye." "It storms so fearfully, don'tcherknow, that it breaks me all up."

"We'll run through the rain, presently," replied the good-natured Sanders. "Don't worry."

"Are—are you afraid of the Indians or outlaws, my good man?" the other asked in a whisper, placing his hand upon the conductor's arm.

"No, they've been sent up, long ago. We've ended that, in this country, for good."

"Then, in the name of heaven, what was that?" cried one of the Texas cattle men, jumping up and striking blindly about for his coat. Though half asleep, he had heard the last of the conversation between the tourist and the conductor, and, as the train came to a full stop, he also heard and instantly understood Cabrillo's cry of "Hands up!"

Then there was a never-to-be-forgotten scene among the passengers. Women and men screamed, and, to make matters worse, the man wearing the black beard and red scarf, who rode in the first seat,

turned and faced them like a flash with a brace of pistols. To add to their fright and the noise of the wind and rain, Redwood, Jim, and Tarcedo, who had been stationed car lengths apart below the water tank, kept up the fusillade as they threw themselves upon the platforms.

"Down you go, there!" yelled Snaky to the big Texan, who had at last found his coat and was fumbling for his revolver. The rancher dropped back into the chair instantly, and Snaky held the car with his two pistols.

Cabrillo and Firefly had boarded the engine so quickly that Tom Clark and Josh Larkin, the engineer and fireman, were taken completely off their guard. They knew from past experience that any resistance would only make matters worse, and consequently allowed themselves to be bound hand and foot. They heard the volley of shots that came from the baggage car and post-office, and hoped the outlaws would be unsuccessful in robbing the train.

Redwood was the first of the outlaws to gain the platform of the express car, and he lost no time in gaining an entrance. He threw himself against the door at once, fired a couple of shots from his rifle unpleasantly close to the clerks' heads, and then stood behind a dry-goods box and covered the men.

Cabrillo evidently had no intention of breaking into the post-office, for, after stretching engineer and fire-



JOSÉ CABRILLO.



man on the floor of the engine, he jumped to the ground and hurried to the express car, Firefly taking up his position as lookout among the bushes, now and then pouring a volley through the side of the car.

"Get out of that corner, and open the safe!" cried the chief, entering the express car. The two clerks lost no time in complying with this demand, for one glance at Cabrillo and Redwood was enough to satisfy them that it was a matter of life and death.

"Lose no time with the lock, either, or I'll end your jig with the butt of this gun!" he said, with a volley of terrible oaths.

The trembling hand of the express clerk soon had the door open, and Cabrillo emptied the contents of the great tin box and money drawer into a leather bag. The clerks were then quickly bound and left upon the floor. Redwood blew the lamps out, and followed Cabrillo across the platform.

"Stand up, all of you, and throw your hands higher!" growled the chief of the outlaws, as he entered the car where Snaky was patiently covering the excited passengers. The sight of the dripping bandits, with their pistols and bowie knives, was too much, even for the bravest of the travellers. Cabrillo stood holding the leather sack, his eyes glistening like diamonds as they rested upon them, while Redwood's rifle and Snaky's brace of pistols looked at them from behind.

"Keep your hands in the air, or down you go!" he said, relieving the first man on the right, of his wallet, watch, and chain. "I'll find what we're after."

The cries of the terrified passengers had ceased when they realized that the robbers would not harm them if they complied with their demands; and while Cabrillo searched each one with a swift, experienced hand and eye, the silence was broken only by Fire-fly's occasional shots at the baggage car, which also contained the railway post-office, and by the moaning of the night wind.

Rings, watches, gold, and silver were tossed unceremoniously into the leather bag. At times, a passenger would pour out a volley of oaths at the outlaws, which only made Cabrillo smile. The women burst into a flood of tears, and buried their faces in their arms, but all to no avail. The robber took everything in sight, and whenever a man's watch was missing, he generally knew where to find it, either in the person's shoe or under the seat, where it had been hastily thrown.

Conductor Sanders was backed into a seat, and Cabrillo took possession of his watch and pocket-book. When the last man was searched, the chief dragged the heavy bag across the platform, where Jim stood covering the inmates of the next car. No one would have guessed, if they had seen the one-

eyed man then, that he had ever for a moment thought of abandoning the wild life of an outlaw, for he looked the villain through and through. He had burst in upon the travellers before they fully realized the meaning of it all, and while he stood with his back to the door, waiting the chief's coming, the desperate light that shone from his one eye, and the sight of the great, glittering pistols, effectually settled all thoughts of resistance on the part of the passengers.

This car was plundered in much the same manner as the first, and not a shot was exchanged. The women gave up their precious stones without a struggle or an attempt at concealment, acting as if they were glad to have it over with.

"Take them and welcome," they said to the chief, "and much good may they do you!"

The rascals then left Jim, entering the car Tarcedo stood guarding with his rifle. Cabrillo repeated his commands, and was soon emptying everything of value into the bag. The faces of both the men and women were deadly pale, and it is doubtful if they could have moved from their positions if they had wished to. By the time the last man was searched, the robber chief had about all he could conveniently carry in the leather sack.

"Shoot down the first one that moves!" he cried, opening the door at the end of the car and firing

three shots in quick succession. This brought a series of wild screams from the passengers in the Pullman, which was the last car of the train. Tarcedo kept his rifle upon the passengers, while Cabrillo and Redwood stood upon the platform as the train moved off over the swollen river; for Firefly, after the chief's three shots, had boarded the engine and thrown open the throttle.

When the train had reached the opposite bank of the river, Cabrillo and Redwood slid off the steps and disappeared rapidly in the darkness towards their horses. The yellow lights of the car windows gradually lost themselves in the storm as the train crept on down the track.

The robbers found the horses just as they had left them, huddled together beneath the jack-oaks.

"Get out a couple of saddle-bags, and we'll divide the carry," said the chief, hoarsely, "for we must ride like mad. Are the boys comin' back?"

"I don't see 'em, or the train, nuther," replied the other, holding the saddle-bag so that Cabrillo could empty part of the contents of the leather bag into it. "We're well out of it."

The treasure was placed in three different bags, which were securely fastened to the horns of the saddles, and the saddle-girths were tightened. By the time this was done, the first hallooming of the

other outlaws was heard as they came running up the track.

Cabrillo answered the call, and the panting bandits soon joined them and flung themselves into their saddles. Not a word was spoken. The chief led the wild ride the rest of the night, through gullies and creek bottoms, past herds of cattle gathered under the shelter of a cliff, and up and down rocky passes, until it seemed as though the gallant horses could stand it no longer. Coyotes, wolves, and deer fled before the night-riders, who lashed their tired animals unmercifully. What a sight it was! Now and again the lightning would flash and show the plunging horses and riders in a sweeping silhouette, and then all would disappear, and the bright sparks struck from the flying hoofs alone would mark the outlaws' trail.

Towards morning the storm gradually subsided. The bandits entered Grouse creek three miles below their retreat, and though the stream was necessarily much deeper and swifter than usual, they rode in single file to the mouth of the brooklet, where they dismounted and led their utterly exhausted horses up the bed of the spring.

The long ride and the fresh early morning air had left them tired and hungry. They led their horses to the corral, where they threw blankets upon them, and gave them a light feed of hay and a little water.

Tarcedo and Jim busied themselves with the camp-fire, and presently a roaring blaze cast a genial warmth about the enclosure, and a score of steaks and a coffee-pot 'sputtered and simmered on the coals.

The three bags, laden with the treasure, were placed upon the table in the retreat, the men gathering about the fire with their blankets, well satisfied with the events of the night. They had done well, the chief said, and everything had gone smoothly. They knew that a party would be sent in pursuit at once, but they had had such parties after them before, and feared them very little. The heavy rain had helped to cover all traces of the trail, which satisfied the outlaws that they had earned a summer's rest; and they certainly devoured the steaks as if nothing was on their minds. Then they lighted their pipes and discussed the hold-up with many a brutal laugh.

"I don't think those little dudes will grow any for a year," chuckled Redwood. "Cap'n had a hard time to pinch their watches; they trembled like so many aspen leaves."

"How much was the haul, cap'n?" asked Dody.

"Haven't looked," replied Cabrillo, "but I'll allow it'll make your eyes bulge."

"Let's take a peep," suggested Jim. "Them bags is heavy enough."

Cabrillo would have been very glad to have post-

poned the distribution of the stolen money and jewels, for he foresaw it would be likely to make hard feeling among the men; but he could think of no reasonable excuse for not complying with the suggestion, and so followed the men into the house, where they stood about the table while he cut the thongs that secured the ends of the bags. The gray light of dawn fell through the barred windows as watches, diamonds, pieces of gold, and pocket-books rolled out upon the table.

"We got them that time, didn't we, cap'n?" exclaimed Jim, rubbing his hands together as Cabrillo started to empty the second saddle-bag. "It'll make us all rich."

The others watched the glittering mass with the same eagerness, now and then uttering an exclamation of intense satisfaction as their eyes rested upon a particularly brilliant stone or well-filled pocket-book. When everything was at last emptied, Cabrillo tore off the yellow papers and broke the red seals that bound the express packages.

"This was to the National Bank of Dallas," said the outlaw, who was inclined to be facetious, "and I am sorry that it has been carried so far out of its way, for it contains nothing but bills of a small denomination. Will you kindly see how many are there, Dody?" Tarcedo took the package and commenced to count them.

"Ah, this is better!" continued the chief, as he broke open a second parcel and lighted a cigarette. "Take seats, boys, for we shall be some time at this pleasant occupation."

The entire band grinned at this, and followed their leader's example by settling themselves upon the three-legged stools.

José took the pen, dipped it into the ink, and commenced to place figures upon the yellow wrapper as he counted the fresh green bills with the ease and quickness of an experienced bank clerk. The odd assortment of wallets and pocket-books was then collected, emptied, and counted, and the stray pieces of gold and silver were treated in the same way.

"Quite a wealthy band," he said, when the numerous additions were at last completed, and Tarcedo had turned in the amount of his lot. "Something over eighteen thousand dollars, besides the rest. Will you have the divide now?"

"Yes, cap'n, yes," they replied eagerly; "the job's done, and we'll take our pay."

"Then, let's have no words or hard feelin', any one. That won't go."

They leaned forward with their great arms upon the table. Cabrillo started with the currency, and counted out a hundred dollars to each, placing double that amount aside for himself. The men grasped the bills and smoothed them affectionately,

resting their arms about them. He counted around again and again until the divisions were all made, and then he did likewise with the watches and jewels, ending by tossing each a good-sized wallet.

When each one had arranged and disposed of his plunder as best suited his fancy, Cabrillo ordered a lookout of three stationed upon the barricade.

"Each one of you has made the best part of five thousand dollars," he said earnestly, "and you've



been a credit to the camp. Now, for a week or two, let's keep an eye on the country, for they'll be after us afore long. But as soon as one of you tries to give me the go-by, down you go in your tracks." The oath that followed this threat did not make it any more forcible, for not one of the band had ever

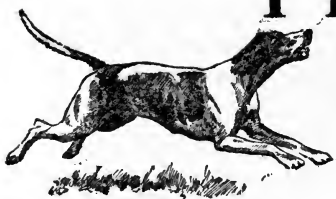
seen Cabrillo worsted, and they knew he meant every word he said.

The lookout took up its position upon the bowlders, while Cabrillo and the rest busied themselves in tidying up the camp. The swollen legs of the horses were then swathed in cool, wet bandages, after which the outlaws stretched themselves upon their blankets and smoked or slept till noon, when the watch was relieved.

While they are leading the monotonous life of an outlaw in retreat, let us look in upon our heroes at Deer Lodge, and see what adventures befell them on the same day.

CHAPTER VII

AN EXCURSION



"HALLOO, up there!" shouted Eugene from the foot of the stairs at Deer Lodge, about the time Cabrillo and his band were climbing to their retreat after the hold-up. "Are you fellows never going to get up? It's

nearly sunrise, and the creek is just right for a canoe trip."

"Has it stopped raining?" asked Jack, jumping out upon the floor and beginning to dress.

"Yes, and the sun's coming out. We'll take Von," continued Eugene, meaning one of Walter's setters, "and a couple of the canoes with our guns and fishing tackle. Shall I tell Tony to get the lunch?"

"Just as you like," replied Arthur, "only Harry mustn't go."

"Mustn't go!" repeated Harry, indignantly. "I'm as well as I ever was."

"That may be," said his brother, "but you couldn't stand the paddling."

"Let it go to vote," suggested Paul.

Having come to this determination, the club, with the exception of Harry, descended to breakfast.

"I'm of the opinion that Harry should remain just where he is for at least forty-eight hours," commenced Arthur. "He got some severe scratches, which will be a long time healing."

"It would never do to let him go, and rest and quiet are the best things for him," added Walter. "He's had an adventure worth boasting about, and I, for one, would be glad to change places with him."

And so the matter was settled. Harry, though impetuous and adventure-loving, possessed a good share of what is plainly known as common sense, and was willing to abide by the wishes of his friends. His feelings, however, as he watched them load the two canoes with their guns and fishing tackle, were not of the most pleasant nature.

"I'm going to miss a good day's fun," he soliloquized, leaning upon his elbow and looking down at the jetty. "But it can't be helped now, and so I must wait. I wouldn't have missed the excitement of killing that wildcat for all the fish or game they'll get."

When Harry said this, he honestly believed it.

But when his chums returned that night and told him their story, he was willing to admit that he had missed a great deal. A few minutes' rapid preparation sufficed to put everything in readiness for the start. Paul, Jack, and Arthur took seats in one canoe, while Eugene, Walter, and the setter Von filled the other. The boys grasped the paddles and were about to leave the wharf, when Pietro called to them from the bank.

"You haven't forgotten your promises about them outlaws, have you?" he said.

"No; we can't say we have, much as we'd like to," the boys called back.

"Well, mind you don't, for they mean mischief."

With this no very pleasant parting shot, the herdsman turned and walked towards the stable. The boys, after calling a cheerful good-by to Harry, commenced their journey down the swollen creek. As Eugene had predicted, the sun soon after appeared and warmed the air. The singing of the birds and the occasional yelp of the impatient setter, together with the rhythmic swish with which the paddles left the water, were the only sounds that disturbed the silence of woodland and stream.

"If I could forget those rogues, I should be tempted to call this 'the sportsman's paradise,'" said Jack, jointing his rod as a great black bass arose just below to suck in a belated grasshopper. "Kindly back

water, fellows, and I'll show you how we fish the head-waters of the Delaware."

So saying, Jack clapped the reel upon the rod and drew the fine silk line through the small nickel hoops, ending by fastening a gaudy fly to the end of the line.

"The water's a trifle brown for fly-fishing," he said, raising the rod above his head for a cast, "but that fly ought to be seen most anywhere."

And so it was. The fly struck thirty feet down stream, and was gently drawn back but a few feet when it was eagerly struck by the fish, which was as eagerly hooked by the excited boy. The reel sang as the fish started up stream, the fine line cutting the water with a sharp swish.

"You've got him, Jack, you've got him!" exclaimed Paul, turning the canoe with one stroke of the paddle.

"Out of the way, Gene!" called Arthur, as the bass neared the second canoe, which was drifting down upon them. "He's a beauty."

Jack managed to coax the infuriated fish to turn back, and then the battle royal took place. Time and again the bass would leave the water with an angry lash, and the light, split bamboo rod would bend double. Whenever it started towards the angler, the reel would sing again, as the slack line was taken up and let out, or as the fish would change his tactics and whip about under the canoe.

The struggle was watched intently by the others.

Jack's skill with the fly-rod was well known at the academy, and the boys were of the opinion, after five minutes' exciting play, during which some cleverly executed changes of position took place, as the fish fought from under the canoe, that his reputation was well deserved.

"Good enough!" they exclaimed in chorus, as the exhausted bass was finally drawn towards the canoe. "He'll weigh six pounds."

"And we'll have fresh fish for dinner," said Arthur, reaching out and taking a firm hold of the fish's mouth and gills, and lifting it, dripping and splashing, into the canoe. "I'm glad we shan't be obliged to dine upon the 'little fishes that come in tin boxes,'" he continued with a smile, recalling part of the conversation he had overheard the previous day, "for Tony has put some in the basket."

By this time the others had rigged their tackle, and soon after another fine bass lay floundering in Walter's canoe. The boys continued to whip the stream a while longer, but without further success, and finally put away their tackle and continued to paddle down stream.

"How do you fellows really feel about those bandits?" asked Walter, as the two canoes drifted along together. "Are we going to be afraid to leave camp separately? I, for one, am in favor of standing our ground."

"Of course," replied Paul. "We ought to; we have come to enjoy our summer, and I am not going to confine my conduct to Pietro's rules and regulations. It is all very well for those rascals to plan to rob us of our good things and guns, but the robbing itself is a bird of another color."

"But you should have seen how desperate they are," said Arthur. "Walter knows that they have been a source of great annoyance to his father and uncle."

"Yes, but that was when Holton led the band. He's gone now, and they have had no success in their raids of late."

"Then they've attempted robberies?" asked Jack.

"Well, yes; though they were driven back to the hills twice last spring, as perhaps some of you read in the papers."

"I remember," Eugene replied. "The hold-ups were boldly planned, but for some reason or other things didn't pan out for the outlaws."

"And they won't be very likely to try it again," added Arthur. "You remember that the young fellow we saw yesterday, who can be no other than Cabrillo, for he is known as Wild Face, spoke only of robbing our lodge. That shows that he is not anxious to try anything very dangerous at present; and if he is beginning to lack nerve to carry out his

raids, I believe we can hold our own against him and his band of rascals."

"Why do you suppose he took the trouble to sell Harry the horse?" asked Paul.

"He must have had his own reasons. Judging from what I have heard, this man Cabrillo is a very shrewd person, and has saved quite a fortune. You see, some of his men had deserted him, probably in the night, and were unable to get away with their mounts. So Cabrillo lost no time in getting rid of the horses to very good advantage."

"I suppose he wanted to get a nearer view of us, too," said Jack, "and ascertain if we had brought any money with us."

"Very likely."

While this conversation was taking place, Cabrillo and his band, having divided the spoils of the night in the retreat on the summit of the cliff, not a quarter mile from where the boys were paddling, were stretched contentedly upon their blankets. If Harry had been with our heroes, he would perhaps have noticed the bended branches that marked the spot where the outlaws had entered the bed of the brook-let not four hours before. But he had not mentioned to his friends how he had seen the outlaw disappear the day previous, and so the boys remained in ignorance of the nearness of the bandits' camp, and of the trail that led to it. They, of course, knew noth-

ing of the events of the night, and were in consequence forced to spend a very trying and exciting quarter hour that morning, and at the same time instantly change the opinions they had expressed concerning José Cabrillo and his band of rogues.

"Fellows," said Jack, resting his paddle upon the gunwale of the little craft, "I'm free to confess that I'm getting very tired and hungry. I move that Eugene, as proposer of this delightful canoe trip, give directions for the pitching of a camp not too far from a cool spring, and see to the carrying out of the other necessary orders for the enjoyment of a substantial meal."

"Agreed!" cried the club in chorus.

Of course Eugene hummed and hawed good-naturedly, and made a great favor of consenting to the proposal, finally ending by saying:—

"My friends: I trust that in conferring this honor, you have no selfish thoughts whatever, and will be entirely at my service. I can think of nothing that will give me greater pleasure than in directing a quartet of such manly good fellows, who in addition are natural Nimrods."

"Hear, hear!" protested the boys.

"Silence!" replied the captain, peeping into the lunch basket. "Tony has been good enough to put up two loaves of bread, six boxes of the 'little fishes that come in tin boxes,' a gingerbread cake, a coffee-

pot, butter, and pickles. Although we have on hand two very fine bass, we shall also need a brace or two of quails and a camp-fire, for I am partial to the feathery rather than to the finny tribe. You will perceive a grove of oaks upon your left. As director of this august band of young woodlanders, I command the flotilla to land upon the pebbly beach. Private Hillman, assisted by Von, will see to the appearance



VON AND THE QUAIL.

of a half-dozen quails within thirty minutes. Private Trehearne will prepare the fish he was so good as to coax from the unknown depths, while Privates Martin and Marshall will build the camp-fire and see that the quails, before leaving the coals, have assumed the correct shade of brown." And with this multiplicity of facetious directions, the canoes struck the beach and were drawn half way out of the water.

Walter and Von were off in an instant, while Jack commenced to clean the bass. Paul and Arthur had not gone a stone's throw into the grove before they discovered a spring that gushed out beneath a great blue boulder. There were no trails leading to it, and from all appearances the boys were the first to camp in that wild spot. Squirrels, bluejays, and blackbirds chattered and fought noisily among the branches. It was, indeed, an ideal place for a camp.

"We've found the place for the camp-fire," said Paul to his cousin, as he and Arthur returned to the canoes where Eugene was idly watching Jack clean the fish. "Aren't you going to assist in the preparation of the repast?"

"Couldn't think of it. The cares of leadership have left me physically unable to lift a finger," he replied.

"Then you might bag a brace of those squirrels," said Arthur with a smile, indicating the grove by motioning with his hand over his shoulder.

"Ah, that's different!" said Eugene, as he took his beautiful little rifle from the canoe and started for the woods.

Paul and Arthur transferred the lunch basket and other articles to the spring, cut a goodly portion of wood for the fire, arranged the eatables upon the ground which served as a table, and then stretched

themselves in the shade of the oaks. As soon as Jack appeared with the fish, they lighted the fire and placed it, wrapped in buttered paper, among the coals.

"Now this is what I call enjoying life," said Paul to his chums, as they stretched themselves once more beneath the trees. "I'm as hungry as a bear, Arthur, so I believe you'd better put on the coffee-pot; the smell of steaming coffee makes one even hungrier."

Arthur arose and placed the pot upon the fire. "I suppose they'll be back soon," he said.

"I've heard them both fire several times," replied Jack. "Yes, here comes Walter," he concluded, as Von came bouncing in.

"An even eight birds," said Walter, tossing the contents of his pockets upon the ground. "And Von stood them to perfection!"

"How many did he stand? Two dozen?" asked Arthur, who was also inclined to be facetious.

Walter had no ready retort to make, and so did not reply. The boys began to pick and clean the birds at once, after which they were buttered and placed just above the blaze, upon green branches which had been stripped of the bark.

"If you fellows were as hungry as I," said Walter, after the quails and fish had been placed upon pieces of bark, and everything was in readiness to begin the

meal, "you'd vote to forget the rules of etiquette for once, and not wait —"

The sentence was interrupted by the sound of Eugene's voice, as if in distress. The boys jumped to their feet and grasped their revolvers and guns. Faint and far off at first, the sound grew nearer until the words were clearly heard and understood.

"Run, fellows, run!" they heard their chum call, the sound of his voice growing louder as he drew nearer; the next instant he staggered into camp, his breath all spent, his hat gone, and carrying a squirrel and rifle in either hand.

"What is it, Gene?" the boys asked excitedly.

"Outlaws!" he gasped. "To the canoes!"

Then there was excitement indeed. Whatever the boys might have thought about their ability to successfully defend themselves against an attack by the bandits, they certainly did not act upon this occasion as though they cared to exchange compliments with them. Their chum had burst in upon them with a white face and startling news, and they lost no time in reaching the boats.

"Down stream!" cried Eugene, sinking back into the canoe. "We can make better time."

Walter threw Von into the canoe and pushed off. Arthur, Paul, and Jack followed a second later, and the canoes darted down stream under the powerful strokes of the paddles.

"Did you see them? Were there many?" asked Walter, glancing over his shoulder towards the abandoned camp-fire.

"There were six or eight," replied Eugene, his voice trembling with excitement, "and they fired at me."

"Fired at you!" repeated Walter, looking almost incredulous.

"Yes, fired at me," returned the other. "I heard the report and the bullet strike in the brush ahead of me. Hurry!" This seemed to give the paddlers even greater strength, for they bent to their work like good fellows, and were soon half a mile down stream.

"Are there any sounds of pursuit?" asked Walter, as the canoes flew along.

"I haven't heard any," replied Eugene, who was somewhat recovering from his natural fright.

"Perhaps it would be a good plan to go ashore here; they might be on their way to head us off."

"Yes; we can hide the canoes in the brush," said Arthur.

"Then we'll turn into this cove," answered Walter, "and keep out of sight."

"Well! of all the delays and interruptions that ever took place before dinner," said Jack, as he assisted in dragging the canoes upon the bank, "I believe this is the worst."

"It is quite a change in position and peace of mind

in a very short while," added Paul. "We'll hear the story from my worthy cousin, now."

"It isn't quite so funny as you fellows seem to think," began Eugene, wiping the perspiration from his brow. "I started for squirrels, as you know, and worked my way through the grove in no time, bagging a brace as I went. I had followed a line of timber for about half a mile, when I was startled by hearing the dull thud of galloping horses, together with the excited shouts of men. I ran to the top of a hill, and there they were, riding at full speed around a bunch of jack-oaks. I knew they had heard the report of my rifle, and were looking for me, so I took to my heels. They were armed to the teeth and thoroughly desperate, as you shall see. When within about fifty yards of the grove, I left the oaks and started to cut across, for I had glanced behind and had seen nothing of them, and thought I should have time to gain the shelter of the larger trees —"

"Was it then they fired?" asked Arthur.

"Yes. I had almost reached the cover when I heard them tear over the hill at full gallop. The foremost rider called for me to stop, which I did not do, but turned and threw myself through the brush into the woods. He fired once, but the bullet struck the brush far in advance."

"Well! Things *are* getting serious," exclaimed Walter. "I wonder what Pietro will say to that."

"Don't let's worry about Pietro," said Jack. "I wonder how we're going to get anything to eat, now."

"Did any one leave anything besides the eatables?" asked Walter with a grin.

"I think not," replied the hungry Jack, with ill-concealed disgust. "I'll give any gun or rod in my collection for a brace of those quails with enough of that spring water and bread to wash them down."

"If Harry were here, he'd take you up," said Eugene. "I want no part of the affair."

"And I don't much blame you," answered Jack, taking a more serious mood. "It would be foolhardy to attempt such a thing. The question now is, what's best to be done?"

"Either one of two things," replied Walter, quickly. "We can wait here till dark, and then paddle back to the lodge; or we can start now and walk cautiously back on this side of the creek. Which do you think better?"

"Let's go back now, by all means," suggested Eugene.

"What's that?" exclaimed Paul, grasping his cousin by the arm.

"What's what?" repeated the others, looking curiously at their friend.

"Didn't you hear that call? Listen!"

The club stood motionless and listened while the cry was repeated.

"I heard something that time," said Arthur. "It sounded as if it came from the camp. Let's leave the canoes and work along the bank, and try to see what it is. We'll be out of sight among the willows."

"Stay — wait — one moment!" exclaimed Walter, as the club started for the opposite side of the cove. "We may be running into danger."

"Not if we keep well out of sight. Perhaps they haven't discovered the camp, and we can enjoy our meal in peace," argued Arthur.

This made the famished boys view the proposal in the same light, and they were soon following Arthur through the dense growth of willows. They walked steadily for some minutes, finally reaching the willows opposite the grove of oaks where they had camped.

"Who'll be the spy?" asked Eugene, whose courage was beginning to return. "I'll go with any one."

"No, one is plenty," said Arthur with decision. "And since I proposed it, I shall be that one."

"Very well, then," assented Eugene. "If anything goes wrong, fire your pistol."

Arthur was soon out of sight among the trees, and the boys stretched themselves upon the ground and waited. They had not been at Deer Lodge a week, and one of their number had already been

fired upon by a band of notorious rascals, who had planned to rob them of their provisions and guns. Things were certainly getting to be dangerously serious, and something would have to be done at once.

"I don't believe that fellow tried to shoot me," said Eugene, drawing a short breath as he recalled his exciting chase, "for the bullet hit forty feet ahead. Then, too, the others had time to fire. How do you account for that?"

"They probably wished to capture you," Walter replied, "and thought to frighten you into stopping."

"Then they were fooled for once," laughed Eugene. "I wonder how Arthur is getting on, and how many pairs of eyes are watching the vicinity of our camp at this moment."

"We shall soon hear something, for here comes Arthur back on all-fours," answered Jack.

"And looking deeply puzzled," added Walter. "How many of you fellows would have joined the club last winter, when we met in my room at the academy, if you had known that we were to make the acquaintance of a band of thieving rogues the first week, and that our first dinner in the woods was to be interrupted by a cowardly attack upon one of the members?"

"All, all!" they answered heartily, not willing to

allow Walter to bear the blame of unavoidable circumstances. "A little excitement kills no one."

"No, but Winchester rifles do," said Walter. "Another such incident, and we shall be forced to spend the remainder of the summer at the ranch."

By this time Arthur had come up, and stood scratching his head, looking as though he were endeavoring to solve a Chinese puzzle.

"Well, we're impatient," began the boys; "give us the news."

"I haven't much. The rascals have left a pole standing where we landed, at the end of which they have tied a small American flag and a handkerchief. I watched the vicinity of the fire very closely for some moments, but could see nothing of any one."

"Good!" exclaimed Walter, eagerly, after he had thought a moment. "Fellows, I believe that the men were not outlaws, but a party in search of some roving cattle thieves; everything goes to prove it. There were six or eight in the party, any one of whom could have hit a mark half the size of our broad-shouldered Eugene. Their firing but the one shot in advance of him goes to show that they meant him no harm; and they have left the handkerchief as a flag of truce, and the American flag to show they were acting in the interests of Uncle Sam."

"Excellent, Walter. You're a second Sherlock Holmes. What is our next move?" asked Paul,

"To go back and eat the dinner, for it is only twelve o'clock. It will be a bit cold, but will taste just as good."

"Perhaps one had better cross the creek and bring it over," suggested Arthur. "That will necessitate only one fording."

"Agreed," said Eugene. "I shall be glad to offer my services to atone for the bad scare I involuntarily gave you. Are you sure there won't be another scare?"

"Positive," answered Walter.

"Then here she goes," said the lad, throwing off his boots and wading into the stream. The others came out and stood upon the bank, watching their chum wade waist-deep through the water. Their fears had been put at rest by Walter's very plausible explanation of the riders' behavior, and they were well-nigh famished as they stood waiting for Eugene to return with the victuals.

As Eugene walked out on the pebbly beach, he glanced at the pole which held the flag of truce and the stars and stripes, and saw something that had escaped Arthur's scrutiny. It was a piece of paper rolled about the stick and tied with a white cord. The boys watched Eugene closely as he broke the fastening and read the paper.

"What does it say?" called Jack.

"It says 'We thought you was somebody else.

That was a good dinner. So long!" read Eugene, loud enough for his chums to hear. "I don't believe I'll have the opportunity of conveying that delicious dinner to the hungry members of the Greyhound Club."

"The thought was mutual, at any rate," said Paul, dryly.

"Well, go and see what's left," cried Jack.

Eugene disappeared into the woods at once, and was soon at the camping ground. He was not surprised at not finding a whole slice of bread about the place. The intruders had eaten everything in sight, and even the sardine boxes were as clean as though a hungry greyhound had licked them. These Eugene gathered in a paper and presently returned to his friends.

"This is all that is left," he said, tossing them one after another upon the water; "everything's eaten, even the last pickle."

The looks of disappointment and anger that came over the faces of his friends showed how provoked they were.

"It's no use crying over spilled milk. Let's go back to the canoes, build another fire, and have a dinner in spite of all. The fire's out back there, and things are so mussed up it wouldn't be any fun to dine there now. Besides, we shall have to get the boats, anyway," said Eugene, taking the handker-

chief and flag from the pole. "I'll keep these as souvenirs of our first attempt at camping in the woods."

Eugene recrossed the stream, and without another word the party set out, Walter leading with Von.

"Shoot everything in sight, Walt," said Paul, loading his rifle and bringing up the rear, "from a meadow-lark to a prairie-chicken."

"Indeed I shall. I believe I'd shoot a sparrow."

Fortunately, Walter was not forced to bag such trifling game, for quails were soon found. Whenever they would rise in pairs, Walter would make as pretty a double as one could wish to see. Walter could never explain how he had become such a crack shot, and could impart no useful information to his many friends.

"I wait till the bird seems to be sitting right on the end of my gun, and then I fire," he always said in answer to their questions.

"And the bird invariably drops," they would reply. But try as they would, Walter was the acknowledged champion wing-shot at the academy, and a very useful and important member of the club on occasions of this sort.

Walter and the setter worked off to the right, the others continuing towards the cove where the canoes lay hidden. Eugene, who again became the acknowledged leader of the party, gave his directions,

and soon everything looked cosy about the camp. A fire was built, Paul and Arthur dressed the birds they had taken from Walter, while Jack busied himself preparing the second bass they had captured that morning.

"It's good we left this fellow in the canoe," he said, "or we shouldn't have had anything but birds. Did they take the coffee-pot, Gene?"

"They must have, for I saw nothing of it."

Walter came in with four more birds soon after, and a very hungry and tired lot of boys gathered in the shade and devoured the simple fare. After the meal, the boys lay upon their backs, as tired boys will do, and discussed the incidents of the morning thoroughly. They were inclined to view the thing as a huge joke, and decided not to let Harry know anything whatever about it.

"He would have stood his ground like a rock, even after catching sight of Eugene's deathly pale face," said Walter. "That reminds me, Gene; where did you lose your sombrero?"

"It flew off my head just before I reached camp. When I went for the dinner just now, I searched the bushes thoroughly, but those fellows had taken it."

"If we had left our guns, they would probably have taken those, too," said Walter. "These fellows, after losing a bunch of steers, are about as hard to deal with as outlaws. We've had enough of this

vicinity to-day, and I am in favor of paddling back."

The boys readily agreed to this proposal. The canoes were launched, and the paddles flashed once more in the sunlight as the boats headed for the creek. As the club advanced, a flock of blackbirds, which had been chattering and sporting in a group of willows at the water's edge, suddenly took flight. Before the whirl of their wings had fairly died away, the setter, which was in the canoe occupied by Eugene and Walter, began to utter a series of fierce growls. The boys looked closely at the bushes and trees, and saw that they moved perceptibly, as though some heavy beast were slowly working his way through the dense undergrowth. The lads sat motionless, their mouths and eyes wide open. The color seemed to have faded entirely from their cheeks, and they were indeed badly frightened.

"Do you think they're the outlaws?" Arthur managed to gasp at last. "Shall we shoot?"

"No; wait till you see. I believe it's a bear — a silver-tip!" Walter replied.

These words had a wonderful effect upon the members of the club. They had read numberless stories about hunting the silver-tip bear, and had always been anxious to shoot one. They had asked Walter many times at the academy if there was any chance of getting a fair shot at one, but he had invariably re-

plied that they were very scarce, but that the common black bears were quite thick. His words, therefore, instantly dispelled all unwelcome thoughts of Cabrillo's men, and brought back their hunters' instincts at one and the same time.

"Do you see that black mass coming through the brush?" asked Walter in an excited tone, pointing with his paddle towards the shore. "How many rifles have we?"

"Only two, and Eugene's is a twenty-two," answered Paul, startled by the unnatural sound of his voice.

"Then get out the pistols," returned Walter, "and let him have it if he shows himself."

Suiting the action to the words, he whipped out his hammerless revolver and placed it between his legs on the floor of the canoe. He then dropped the paddle and caught up his shot-gun, while Eugene and Jack kept the canoes in position.

"I'll pour this volley into the 'brush,'" he said, as the black mass ceased to move but was plainly visible. "If he comes out, shoot everything you can put your hands on."

As he concluded, he raised the fowling-piece to his shoulder and fired twice in quick succession. The reports of the gun were taken up by the animal, which growled with all the terrific energy of his savage nature.

"Yes, it's a silver-tip," said Walter in a hoarse whisper, "and there he goes!"

Sure enough, the bear had turned and crashed through the dense, dark undergrowth in the direction of the cliffs. His growls and the snapping of the bushes could be heard for some moments, during which our heroes held their breath in silence.

"Well!" exclaimed Jack, drawing a long breath of relief as he dipped the paddle and headed the canoe towards the current. "That's the most savage growl I ever heard. I wouldn't have believed it of any living animal."

"Neither would I," assented Arthur. "The noise about a menagerie at feeding-time is nothing to that. I'll bet he's a big fellow."

"Let's have a look at his tracks," suggested Eugene.

The boys were out on shore in a moment, and were soon creeping beneath the bushes to the spot where the bear had stood.

"Here they are," said Jack, gleefully, "and they look as if a rhinoceros had left them."

"I believe it would take a young cannon to kill that fellow," added Paul. "Ordinary repeating rifles would only provoke him."

"Well, we'll have a hunt for him, anyway," said Walter. "He'll hang around here, feeding upon an occasional cow as the cattle come to water. Let's pull for camp!"

As he said this, he started the canoe with one stroke of the paddle, and the other boat followed in the wake. At intervals, as the boys neared the outlaws' camp, they were in full view of Cabrillo and his men, whose keen eyes never left them voluntarily until they had disappeared up the stream.

"They've got a 'crackerjack' outfit, them fellers have," Cabrillo confided to his man Firefly, as they sat upon the bowlders smoking their pipes; "and we must have the whole thing, 'cause we can't jump to town, now, and buy ourselves an outfit."

"We're rich, cap'n, we can cross the big pond," suggested Firefly.

"Not just now, Bill. Them officers are thicker than houses in the city, and smarter than red paint."

"Well, I'm in for holdin' up that shootin' camp, then," said Firefly. "A gentleman with a'most five thousand dollars in his pocket can't afford to eat dried meat a whole summer. I want their pickles and preserves and wine."

"You'll get the pickles and preserves, but I don't guess you'll get the wine, Bill."

"What's the reason I won't?" demanded Firefly. "You ain't goin' to shut it away from us like you used to, be you?"

"It ain't that, Bill," explained the chief; "them fellers is a trifle too white-handed and mealy-mouthed to carry wine along of 'em. Do you understand?"

Firefly said he thought he did, but couldn't see why men with plenty of money should be without whiskey and mixed ale.

"It's all in the rearin'," said José, "and those fellers wasn't reared that way."

While this conversation was taking place, the boys were paddling slowly towards the camp, tired from their day's outing. When they reached the jetty, they sprang out and clambered up the cliff, greeting the greyhounds that came running to meet them.

"Well, you *have* been neglected to-day," said Walter, patting his courser affectionately. "We'll give you a chance to-morrow, perhaps."

The words were hardly out of his mouth when the boys' attention was arrested by a cheery voice from the veranda.

"How now, my hearties!" called Uncle John, as fat and as smiling as ever. "Where's your game?"

"Yes, where's the game?" demanded Harry, appearing upon the porch with his arm in a sling. "I suppose the canoes are loaded?"

"Never mind," Walter replied. "We should like to know why you are up contrary to the club's orders."

"Oh, that is easily explained!" said Uncle John, beaming upon the boys from the porch. "I took pity upon Harry, and gave him permission to dress. He has been entertaining me with an exciting account of his adventure with the wildcat."

"Well, you have taken entirely too much upon yourself," his nephew answered good-naturedly. "What brought you down?"

"Several things. I wished to instruct Pietro in regard to some cattle that are to be driven through here, and I also wished to see how you are getting on. I am glad I came, for you must be more careful."

The boys looked at each other significantly, but said nothing. For a moment they thought that Pietro must have sent word to Uncle John; but, upon hearing more of Mr. Hillman's good-natured cautions, these fears were put at rest.

"Uncle John has had a long ride," said Harry, glancing at his watch, "and so I ordered supper a little earlier. I trust you all have good appetites."

"Very!" said Arthur, dryly; "we dined lightly ourselves."

As Arthur ceased speaking, Tony came out and announced supper, and the tired company filed into the room.



CHAPTER VIII

THE BEAR HUNT

AFTER supper, Uncle John walked out to the stable and held a long conversation with Pietro, while the lads got together and told Harry how they had been within a few feet of the animal, and how they meant to return in force the next day.

When Uncle John told the boys that he had ridden down for the purpose of instructing Pietro in regard to some cattle that were to be driven through there, he told nothing but the truth. He did not add, however, that the cattle would in all probability be driven by half-breed Indians, who had swooped down upon the ranch under cover of the wind and rain of the night before, and had succeeded in getting away with fifty fat steers.

"It's not the same crowd that bothered us last winter," said Mr. Hillman, offering a cigar to the herdsman, "but another nearly as bad. I thought they would probably come through here, and might make the lads some trouble. Seven of my cowboys are hot after them, and I have instructed the boys to give them no quarter."

Uncle John's instructions were the means of causing this same ambitious searching party to fire upon one of his nephew's guests, which, if the genial old gentleman had known it, would have ruffled him considerably. But he did not hear of it until long after, and then he was forced to laugh with the rest.

"Speaking of that gang that hung in the hills last winter," said Pietro, cutting the end of the cigar with his jack-knife, "sort o' forces me to say that the lads is hearin' from 'em already. That young Cabrillo sold Master Harry a clever nag day before yesterday, and he was cheap at an even hundred."

"You don't say so!" exclaimed Uncle John in surprise.

"It's a fact, all the same. Didn't Master Harry tell you?"

"Not a word. It beats all, how that boy gets acquainted so quickly. He's met that villain and has killed a wildcat, single-handed, before a week has passed."

"Yes, and that isn't all. The others have heard something, too. It seems they struck for the creek after their hunt yesterday, and that they happened to catch sight of a figure creeping through the grass —"

"Well, well!" exclaimed Uncle John, as Pietro stopped to light his cigar, "that is very interesting."

"That's right, colonel. Well, Master Walter gets down from his nag, and he and Master Arthur work through the grass like two old hunters after antelope. And what do you think they hear?"

"Haven't any idea — a bullet sing past them?"

"Not at all. This chap in the grass was the owner of the horse Wild Face sold Master Harry, and had come back for the money. It seems some of the men have deserted of late, and while Cabrillo was dickerin' with Master Harry, they probably wasn't a great way off; so that rascal builds a fire and starts to fry a brace of squirrels, cool as a cucumber, do you mind, when the man in the grass kind o' gives him the high sign and braces him for the greenbacks."

"Now I *am* astonished!" cried Uncle John, drawing quickly at his brierwood. "I supposed that band had been dispersed, as I told you before the boys came. Did the lads hear anything else?"

"That's what they did. They heard Wild Face say that the gang had given up engine-ridin', and that they was goin' to give the boys in this shootin' camp a bad scare, and take their fancy guns and pickles."

"It was very foolish to go so near the men. What do you think is best to be done?"

"Oh! we can't do anything, unless we pull back to the ranch, and the lads wouldn't hear of that. I be-

lieve the rogues are losin' their grip. The boys promised me not to go out, except in a bunch, and not to camp over night on the prairie."

"Very good. It would be a pity to have to ask them to return," said the colonel, "and I admire their courage and pluck. But courage and pluck often get youngsters into serious trouble, and so you must keep a close watch on them, Pietro."

"Trust me, sir."

"And now I'll have a look at the horse. Ah! a black," he said, looking into Prince Royal's stall, "and very well put together. He'll gallop well?"

"The lads haven't been out with him. He got scratched in the timber, and has been a bit lame."

"He looks like one of Cabrillo's horses. Those rascals always did ride the very best. What do they call him?"

"Prince Royal."

"The horse fits the name, and the name fits the horse," concluded the colonel, as he walked towards the house.

"Boys," he said, as he approached the veranda where the lads were amusing themselves with their banjos and guitars, "I am sorry to hear that you have already made the acquaintance of this band of rogues, for I can assure you, from past experience, that they are a bad lot. Pietro has just told me what you happened to hear yesterday. I am not going to

advise you to return to the ranch, but will ask you not to get into any trouble with these men. I came down to see if my men had rounded up a band of cattle thieves, and am naturally very much surprised to find that you are already acquainted with even greater villains. Have all the hunting you wish, but promise me not to oppose the outlaws in any way."

"Yes, Uncle John, we promise!" exclaimed the boys in chorus.

"Good-night, then, for I am very tired."

"Hurrah for Uncle John!" shouted the club, loud enough to be heard half a mile away.

The boys broke into a hearty song as Uncle John ascended the stairs, and then completed the arrangements for the hunt. Harry begged so hard that the club decided to allow him to go, but distinctly stated that he was not to take part in the heavy work, to which he readily agreed. It had grown quite dark by the time the plans were completed, and the air was still quite cool from the rain of the previous night.

"If you fellows are not too tired to write your letters I should think this would be a good time," suggested Eugene. "Your mind will be upon other things in the morning."

"That's so," added Walter. "Uncle John will take them back with him."

The lads therefore entered the lodge and commenced to write their many letters. First of all, of

course, the boys wrote to their parents, and then they were good enough to write to some "less fortunate fellow," as they described it, who was forced to spend the summer at the Gap or Bar Harbor. The letters were all in the same strain, Eugene's, perhaps, being the most characteristic, and so we reproduce it as it was written. This is how it ran:—

DEER LODGE, July 12, 189-.

MY DEAR JOE: Well, we are at last settled and enjoying the best sport we ever had. Uncle John Hillman, Walt's uncle, is a perfect brick, and has seen to everything for our comfort. He spent most of his time last spring down here, and as a result we are the lucky owners of a beautiful little lodge,—not so little, either, for it contains kitchen, dining-room, and lodge-room on the ground floor, and four rooms and a dozen bunks on the second story. The stable is in the rear, and we have a herdsman to look after the horses, in addition to a colored cook. What do you think of that? The herdsman's name is Pietro, and he is a jolly good fellow, and thoroughly skilled in horsemanship. Tony, the cook, wears a white duck cap and apron, and looks for all the world like an experienced chef. He cooks very well, too, and puts us up great lunches when we go for a day's hunt.

I have so much to tell you I hardly know where to begin. In the first place, let me say that greyhound coursing is the finest sport on earth. You have no idea how they run! The hares here are known as jack-rabbits, and are very large and have great ears. They turn like a cyclone, and

lead the dogs such a chase that it is difficult, in a rough country, to keep in sight at all. I don't know which dog will prove the fastest ; they're all good. Tasso and Saxony turn quickly, but the others are just as swift in a straight run. It is most exciting to ride slowly through the grass, with the dogs moving slightly in advance. Suddenly, almost before you realize it, a great rabbit rises to view, and the dogs and horses close in with a wild swish and clatter. Turn after turn is made, when the dogs, encouraged by the shouts, steady themselves and follow the rabbit with wonderful sureness, ending the chase by picking it up very prettily. We caught sight of a fox yesterday, and had some sport that would have made the blood of a tried old Kentucky colonel tingle with excitement.

You will not be surprised to hear that Harry has run into mischief already. He has not only shot and killed a wild-cat, nearly meeting his death in so doing, but he has made the acquaintance of the leader of a notorious band of outlaws, who are in hiding in the vicinity, and who mean to rob us of our guns and provisions ; we heard them say so.

It rained hard last night, and so to-day we started down stream in our canoes, and caught our second mess of bass. We started to camp by a sparkling spring, but an unlooked for interruption [Eugene did not say what the interruption was] caused us to desert the spot. We built another fire on the bank of a little cove some distance further down, and ate our fish and quails. We had hardly reached the main creek on our way back, when we were startled by Von's growling and a moving in the bushes. We looked in that direction, and could plainly see a black mass coming towards us. We thought perhaps it was the outlaws, but Walter was right

when he said it was a bear. As the animal continued to remain in the one position, Walter fired the contents of his double barrel at the brush. I shall never forget the growls that followed the report. The beast turned and took to his heels, but, as we had but one serviceable rifle in the party we did not follow. We are going down the creek again tomorrow, and it's dollars to doughnuts we shall have a story to tell by nightfall.

Between silver-tipped bears, outlaws, and coursing the larger game, — for we shall drive the ridges for deer as soon as we kill the bear, — we are likely to have some stories to tell next winter.

Hoping that this letter will not make you feel uncomfortable in your white flannels, and that you are not neglecting your tennis, I am as ever,

Your very sincere friend,

EUGENE MARSHALL.

P.S. I forgot to say that Harry purchased a horse from the outlaw Cabrillo. He's jet black, and moves like a piece of machinery.

E. M.

Eugene was the last to finish, and his wicked smile of amusement, as he directed the envelope, was instantly noticed by his chums.

"Well, tell us the joke," they said.

"I've written a letter to Joe Blakeslee that will make him tear his hair," he replied. "I've described everything that's happened since our arrival."

"I'll bet you didn't mention that little affair at dinner to-day!" cried Jack.

"How do you know I didn't?"

"Because I know. Let's see."

"Can't do it, it's all sealed."

"Then I'll write and describe your method of appearing at a dinner," said Jack, smiling as he reached for a pen and paper. "How was it, fellows? How will this do? 'He sprang among us, hatless, clutching a poor little squirrel in one hand, and a target rifle in the other.'"

"You can't get over losing that dinner, Jack," retorted the other, taking his Winchester down from the elk's antlers that hung above the writing-desk.

"And neither can Tony," replied Jack. "He wants to know what we're going to do for a coffee-pot to-morrow."

"Then you've given orders for a lunch?"

"To be sure; and I'm going to strap my share on my back. If we have any more such alarms, the intruders are welcome to know the color of my knapsack, but I shall enjoy the contents."

"That's pretty good," said Harry. "You keep a fellow home, say you've had a fine time, and then tell him only part of the day's fun. If I were as curious as you fellows were yesterday, I should demand an account of 'that little affair at dinner to-day.'"

"You've let the cat out of the bag, Jack," said Paul. "Now it's only fair to tell Harry all about it."

So Harry became acquainted with the ludicrous incident that robbed the boys of their dinner, and joined in the laugh at Eugene's expense.

The others followed Eugene's example, and cleaned and oiled their Winchesters thoroughly. The heavy leather belts were filled with cartridges, and by the time revolvers and bowie knives were selected and polished, the table fairly bristled with arms and weapons enough to annihilate a herd of buffalo. The remainder of the evening was spent in discussing the various incidents in which they had taken part since their arrival at the lodge, and then they climbed the stairs and tumbled into bed. They did not, however, fall to sleep at once, but tossed about on their pillows, now and then asking questions of each other. They advanced opinions concerning the probable size of the beast, and different methods of obtaining a fair shot. Would it not be a good plan to kill a steer and leave it as a bait, and then return the following night? Or would it not be better to take the greyhounds and setters, and trust to the scent of the latter to find him? No, none of these suited every one concerned. Harry thought the killing of the steer a waste of time and money, and Walter did not wish to see the greyhounds torn apart with one blow from the ani-

mal's claw. The latter finally settled the matter by saying:—

"I believe the bear will be found in the vicinity of the willows, as that is the coolest spot about there. The best way is to go in the canoes, and leave the dogs at home. The horses are not trained to stand fire, and if a fellow is at all unsteady while mounted on a frightened horse, he can't hit the side of a barn. I know what I'm saying, for I've tried it."

This opinion was the last advanced, and the boys soon after lost themselves in sleep. Once or twice in the night Eugene spoke in his sleep, but his "Don't shoot!" and "To the canoes!" fell upon deaf ears.

The boys arose and dressed themselves bright and early the next morning. They were anxious to gain an early start and paddle to the cove while the fresh breeze from the south was still blowing. Tony did not disappoint them, for the table was steaming with hot coffee and corn-bread as they descended, and the lunch basket stood upon the table in the lodge-room.

"My, that smells good!" said Uncle John, entering the room and sniffing hungrily at the odors of hot bread, coffee, and broiling meat. "Does Tony treat you well?"

"Indeed he does," they answered with enthusiasm. "We have to go into the woods occasionally to make ourselves believe we're not at Delmonico's."

"I'm glad to hear it," replied Uncle John, with a laugh.

Breakfast was soon over, and the club, after bidding Uncle John a merry farewell, transferred the lunch basket and rifles to the canoes. The dogs were coaxed into the stable, fed, and shut in a box-stall.

"Everything ready?" asked Pietro, looking up from his task of mounting the wildcat.

"I believe everything is complete," answered Arthur, following his friends down the path that led to the jetty. "If we are not back by dusk, don't worry; for we may possibly have to do some stalking."

"Well, I wouldn't take any risk," said the man, pleasantly. "All the luck in the world to you."

"Thanks, Pietro. We'll stick together."

The boys took their positions, and the canoes were pushed out into the stream. The muddy water of the day previous had faded into a faint brown, and the bottom of the creek in some places was plainly visible. Not a breath of air was stirring, the breeze from the south having died out completely with the rising of the sun.

The gentle strokes of the paddles alone broke the stillness, but even they might have been heard fifty yards away. Occasionally, a snake or turtle would slide from a log into the stream, but even their move-

ments were as lifeless as the songless birds that now and again sailed over the water.

"It's going to be a scorcher," said Paul, removing his coat and hat. "Unless that bear left those willows last night, we'll find him sure. He'll never move on a day like this."

Harry, while listening intently to all that was said, watched the shore on his left very closely, but was unable to determine just where Cabrillo had left the stream with his horse. He turned and took a good look at the cliff where he had been stationed when he noticed the outlaw, and endeavored to mark the bend in the stream. There were a number of brooklets leading to the creek, any one of which might have been used by the outlaw. Harry shrewdly concluded that the man would probably make use of water as a means of covering up his trail, but just which spring would lead to the bandits' camp was difficult to decide. The bed of the stream was for the most part composed of pebbles and sand, which of course would not hold the marks of a horse's hoof for any length of time. Then, too, the water was not clear and still enough to make a close examination from the boats with any success, and the lad decided that he could gain his only clew from the dense growth of willows and bushes that bordered the creek. But in this he was also unsuccessful, for the outlaws had left no trace behind, and the few

branches that had drooped the day previous were now as straight and natural as ever.

Tarcedo, watching from the outlaws' retreat, was the first of the three on guard to catch sight of our heroes, and he lost no time in communicating the intelligence to his chief.

"Cap'n," he said, motioning his chief to mount the barricade, "there goes those pizen kids in them cloth dug-outs!"

"Yes, and look at the fine shootin' irons," added Firefly. "I want one of those belts and a brace of pistols; mine are gettin' played out. When are you goin' to clean 'em out, cap'n?"

"Oh, soon enough! Can't you fellows wait till this sort of blows over?"

"No, we can't," snarled Redwood. "We've a'most five thousand in our pockets, and we don't propose to live on raw meat no longer."

"Waitin' won't help matters none," said Snaky, who had joined the group. "The timber'll be full of those blamed marshals in a day or two, and then we'll be glad to have raw meat." He finished this speech with a terrible oath, and then left the group, stretching himself in the shade.

"You don't have to live on raw meat," Cabrillo called down to him. "You can build your fire on a cloudy night, if you like, and cook enough to last a week. But we'll have no more fires sendin' up their

puffs of smoke durin' the day, and remember it. If anybody holds the pistols, I want to be the one, as I'm more used to doin' business from that end."

"It ain't no sort of grub for gentlemen," said Firefly, almost savagely; "and I want the cap'n to promise to strip that there fancy shootin' camp blamed soon."

"Well, men," the chief replied, "I will say that I'm beginnin' to think well of you since the other night, and I'll give you my hand to pop down on those schoolboys pretty soon. Now, don't let me hear another word against the grub till I'm ready. D'ye hear?"

The others acknowledged that they heard, and the conversation was dropped.

Meanwhile, our heroes had disappeared down the creek, little guessing what robberies were at that moment being planned upon the summit of the noble cliff on their left.

"This is where we took to the canoes yesterday," said Jack to Harry, indicating the beach, "and you'd better believe we made time."

"How far is the cove below here?"

"A matter of a mile or so."

"Then we shall soon be there. Is it near those craggy peaks on our right?" asked Harry, pointing towards a towering hill that was crowned with two or three peaks that shone vividly in the sun. A dense

cover of oaks stretched to the shore from the first of these peaks, through which a spring soaked its way into the cove.

The lads paddled faithfully, and were soon approaching the quiet spot. There was a sort of disturbance among the bulrushes as the canoes were turned from their course; a pair of wild ducks flew up, black-birds followed, and soon a great medley of birds hung in the air, uttering loud screams of protest at being disturbed at their morning bath. The boats themselves, however, slid into the cove as silently as their own shadows.

The bottom land just below the cove had been left black and fenny by the heavy rain, which must have poured in torrents from the sides of the towering peak-crowned hill.

The boys ran ashore and lifted the canoes clear of the water, hearkening, as silent as so many mice. They took their guns, strapped their belts about them, and started through the willows for a little hill that seemed to be quite bare of the swampish trees. A faint steam arose from the bog, and the distant line of the Arkansas river trembled through the haze. The birds that had been disturbed by the appearance of the young hunters had redescended, and the whole valley lay silent in the sunlight.

"I'll wager my horse that we shall find that bear somewhere between here and those peaks," said

Arthur, as the lads halted to hold a short consultation.

"I don't doubt it a bit," replied Eugene, gazing at the great, dark-green masses of foliage. "How are we to proceed?"

"We can do one of two things: either separate in threes and encircle the marsh, or keep together and work the ground in a bunch. The latter would be the better plan, for we can strike the trail he left yesterday, thereby gaining a good start."

"Do you think we can follow it for any distance?" asked Harry, who, in spite of all opposition to the contrary, meant to take part in the hunt.

"We can until it strikes the dry grass; and then, perhaps we can for a little time."

"Well, that seems to be the best plan, and the thing to do," said Walter.

The lads therefore shouldered their rifles and started towards the willows, moving cautiously, as though they were in an African jungle, and feared the spring of a yellow skin.

"I can't get the sound of that fellow's growl out of my head," said Jack, bringing up the rear. "It sounded like a cannon."

The others were of the same opinion, and began to feel that they had undertaken a great big job when they started to kill the bear. The numerous stories they had read concerning the silver-tip's well

known tenacity came vividly to them now, and they even remembered how one particular trapper, having succeeded in closing a silver-tip in a cave, was forced to go each evening for a week and empty the contents of his rifle into the animal before he heard the death struggle.

They crossed the spring in silence, and had no difficulty in striking the trail left by the bear the evening before.

"What do you think of those?" asked Arthur, turning to get a good view of his brother's face.

"I think he'll be worth working hard for," Harry answered promptly.

"Then let's be going, for nothing can be gained by waiting," said Paul, taking up the lead and marching through the dense, dark trees. The boys moved silently and steadily, for they had commenced the hunt, and were bound to go through with it at any cost.

It was an easy matter to follow the trail, for the ground was quite soft even in the dry places, and the imprints left by the great beast were plainly visible. The bear had fed from the berry bushes that grew in profusion about the swamp, and some of the marks had evidently been made since morning.

"The trail's getting fresher, fellows," said Eugene in a whisper, as he dropped upon all-fours and examined an imprint closely. "The mud at the upper edge of this foot-mark is barely dry at all."

"Yes, and that's where he slept," exclaimed Harry, coming upon a thickly-leaved bush that had been bent and crushed by some great weight. "Look at the footprints!"



THE BEAR APPEARS.

"They lead to that thicket yonder," said Walter, "and I believe we shall find him there."

"Who'll shoot first?" asked Arthur.

"Shoot together," answered Walter, cocking his rifle with a faint click. "What was that?"

"I thought I heard a bough break," replied Eugene, in a voice as hoarse as a crow's; and, rash as the proceeding was, he followed the sound.

Before the others could think how to act, before they could even cock their rifles, the thicket burst asunder, and the great frame and wild eye of the animal appeared in full view. He had heard or scented the lads, had doubled on his trail, and came charging down upon them with a growl that rang out like thunder on the quiet air. Eugene stood as though he were cut in stone until it was too late, and then he could not fire; he had no time. All that he could do was to fling himself backwards out of the path of the great brute, as it came rushing upon him. It was none too soon, for the lad felt, as he sank back into a bush, the slight wind made by the bear's wonderfully quick movement.

"Shoot, shoot!" cried Eugene; but his voice sounded strange and hoarse, and, try as he did, he could not moisten his lips. The next instant the bear was past him, charging upon Harry, who was the next in line.

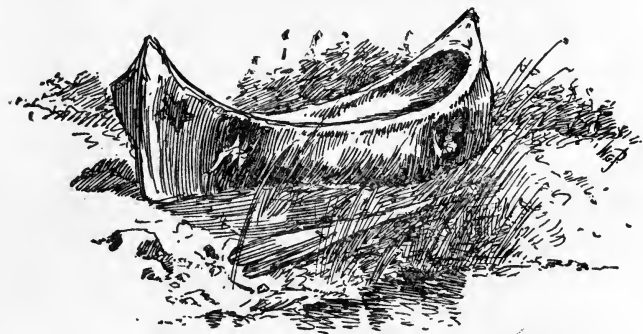
Harry realized his great danger at once, and gave one desperate bound to the right as he raised his rifle and fired at the beast's head. It was then that the others, who had retreated somewhat to the rear, as if

half undecided whether to remain and take part in the battle or not, recovered the use of their senses. Eugene's narrow escape had left them almost stunned, but now they had sufficiently recovered their wits to stand their ground. As the report of Harry's rifle died away, and as the beast blundered past the lad, they saw that the bullet had not struck a vital spot, and only served to further infuriate him. Walter raised his rifle and fired twice in quick succession. The first bullet ploughed up the ground a few feet in advance of the game, showing how badly frightened and nervous the lad must have been. The second shot was more successful, for the beast uttered a most savage kind of growl, and charged upon Walter before the smoke had fairly left his rifle barrel. He dropped the gun and spurted round the thicket, calling loudly to his comrades.

"Fire, fellows, fire!" he shouted, as he cleared the ground like a deer. "He's catching me!" Bang! bang! came the reports of the rifles, but the bullets, if they struck, seemed only to madden the beast to fresh efforts. The boys had unconsciously become separated, which made firing at random very dangerous. Whenever the bear would be in good range, Eugene's trembling form would loom up like a ghost just behind it; and whenever Eugene did not appear directly in range, Walter would look twice as big as the animal as he flew towards or away from them.

"Pull yourself up in a tree!" yelled Harry, almost beside himself with anxiety. "Be careful how you shoot, fellows!"

Walter heard the words, and must have cleared the ground at the rate of ten yards to the second. The spurt brought him to a little cottonwood, not six inches through the base, but which had a friendly limb starting from the trunk some seven feet from the ground. The thought that his friends did not



dare to shoot while the bear was in such close pursuit quickened his speed, and with one swift, sure leap and swing, he cleared the ground and pulled himself among the branches. The next second the beast struck the tree full with his head. Crash! The trunk snapped like a carrot, and the frail branches broke short off as they landed with a dull crash. Bang! bang! bang! spoke the three rifles, the third

shot fortunately bringing him to his knees for an instant. But it was only for an instant, for the animal was up and making for Walter before the lad had disentangled himself from the broken branches. There was but one means of defence left now, and that was his revolver. More by instinct than anything else, he reached for it, and pulled the trigger. Other reports sounded almost at the same moment. Down came the great beast all in a heap, and rolled on to his side as dead as a stone.

CHAPTER IX

STARTLING NEWS



WALTER had no sooner gained an upright position in the young cottonwood than it was struck squarely and with fearful force by the bear's forehead. As the tree went down, the lad endeavored to gain the use of his legs by freeing them from the network of limbs; but, as we have said, he was unable to accomplish this, and quick as thought reached for his pistol and fired. That shot ended the struggle, for the

brute's claw ceased to advance towards the boy's foot, which of course was but a short yard from him, and the next moment, to Walter's intense relief, the silver-tip had rolled on to his side and had ceased to breathe.

The boys came running up, their faces telling the

true story of their terrible fright. The color had faded entirely from their cheeks, and their countenances were as white as a baker's in a great city.

"Are you hurt, Walt?" they asked together, as they came up fairly bristling with pistols and bowie knives. "Did he reach you?"

Walter kept his staring eyes upon the dead body of the bear as though he very much feared another attack. Then his pulses gradually quieted down to a more natural time, and he was once more in possession of himself.

"No," he answered faintly, struggling to his feet as his chums removed the branches that pinned him to the ground. "Why didn't you fellows fire more often?"

"We were afraid to trust ourselves," they answered with voices all a-tremble. "We could hardly separate you from the plunging bear."

Walter glanced at his friends and saw that their rifles shook even then like so many aspen leaves, and was very glad they had not trusted themselves. He could not blame them, for he remembered how his own first bullet had struck the ground some feet in advance of the brute, and how difficult it had been to raise the gun at all.

"Who did the most shooting?" he asked, gazing at the bleeding carcass. "That last shot did the business."

"It was Harry's," said Arthur, quickly; "and that was Paul's shot that brought him to his knees."

"He took more killing than anything I ever heard of," added Jack. "I was entirely too paralyzed to draw on him, and shouldn't have been able to move if he had charged upon me."

"Yes, you would, too," replied Eugene. "Did you ever see more wonderful acrobatic performances than Walter's and mine? It was a case of necessity in both cases. My! I almost felt that fellow's hot breath as he swept past."

"Just look at the bushes he passed through!" exclaimed Walter. "They resemble a cyclone's track on a small scale as much as anything else."

"Well, we've done something worth boasting of, now," said Paul. "That is the largest bear I ever expect to see."

The boys were all of the same opinion, and gradually forgot their fright as they examined the wounds. Two bullets had struck the left shoulder, and had ploughed their way out in the vicinity of the breast, while a third, presumably Walter's pistol shot, had entered and lost itself in the region of the animal's heart.

Harry's first shot had cut an ugly gash across the nape of the neck, but a dozen such wounds would not have checked the great beast's mad rush.

"It's unfortunate that we weren't bunched when his

majesty appeared in sight," said Arthur; "we could have given him a very warm reception."

"We should congratulate ourselves at so fortunate an ending of a dangerous affair," continued Jack. "If I were in Walt's boots, I shouldn't eat nor sleep for a week. As it is, I should be glad to assist in the preparation of the midday meal."

"That's so; it must be nearly noon," answered Walter, who had now entirely recovered his good-nature, "for our epicure is getting impatient."

"Send him for the lunch basket, and we'll dine here by our game," said Harry.

Jack was out of sight in a moment, reappearing soon after with the basket. The lads, after they had viewed the dead bear from every possible point, and had guessed many times at his probable weight, lighted a fire and placed the coffee-pot upon the coals. They certainly did not look as though they had just killed their first bear. They had discarded their rifles and belts, and lay about on the grass like old hunters. They were as conceited over the adventure as so many cocks upon a walk, and one would never have supposed that they had ever fled from any sort of game.

"We'll have to have a club-room at the academy next fall," said Eugene, refilling his tin cup with steaming coffee, "and have that fellow's hide as the grand trophy."

"Then we shall have to begin skinning him at once," replied Walter. "It's a long, hard job, and will take till sunset. We can't leave it here to-night, for the wolves will be thick upon the hills by dark."

The lads began at once to remove the heavy skin. They worked steadily for a couple of hours, for they were inexperienced, and the skin did not yield readily. At last, however, to their great satisfaction, they pulled it clean off the huge, dark-red carcass, caught it up in their arms, and started for the boats. The skin was rolled up and placed across the cock-pit of Walter's canoe, which sunk nearly to the gunwales under the additional load.

The lads were well pleased with themselves and with the world in general, as they paddled out of the cove they had entered so silently that morning. Walter's canoe, followed by her consort, was soon in mid stream, and made good time against the current and the light breeze that had sprung up.

Their appearance below the outlaws' retreat was not unlooked for, though the presence of the huge skin was a decided surprise.

"Just take a peep at what those kids has gone and done!" exclaimed Tarcedo, shading his face with his hand and peering through Cabrillo's telescope. "If they ain't landed a silver-tip, then I'll be blowed!"

"That's what makes me so infernal mad," con-

tinued Firefly. "We've got roll enough to go shootin', with a nigger cook, too, and have pickles and wine. When the cap'n comes in to-night, he'll agree to jump that camp blame soon or there'll be lead singin' 'round here."

As the canoes proceeded up stream, Harry kept a sharp lookout for evidences of the outlaws' trail, but could see nothing, and was forced to admit that if their camp was in that region, they were certainly skilled woodsmen.

"Perhaps Cabrillo could not continue along the bank," he soliloquized, "and was forced to take to the creek that day. He may be miles away by this time; I hope so, at any rate," he concluded, as his thoughts reverted to the exciting events of the morning.

Notwithstanding the bad scratches he had received during his fight with the wildcat, and the indescribable feeling of discomfort that came over him whenever he chanced to think of the outlaws, the lad was overjoyed with the bright, sunshiny weather and the future prospects for sport. He sat in the bow, on the lookout for concealed snags or roots in the water, as the canoe moved steadily against the current. He held his rifle across his knees more through force of habit than anything else, watching the delicately leaved willows, or sometimes catching sight of a kingfisher flashing up from the shallows, and darting up the broad band of sunlight like a jewel flung

through the air. As the canoes moved quickly and silently around a bend in the stream, he recognized the glade upon his right as the very spot in which he had built the fire and had broiled the squirrel he had shot with the outlaw's rifle. This caused him to recollect everything that had transpired during those two mornings, and he was forced to admit that he could not believe anything very bad of Cabrillo.

"I say, fellows, how many more days are you going to neglect your favorites?" he asked at length, as his mind reverted to congenial thoughts of Prince Royal and the greyhounds. "I believe this is the second day in which a saddle-girth has not been tightened. Walter, what is on the card for tomorrow?"

"Anything you like; a gallop with the hounds if you say so," replied Walter.

"Let's have it, then, by all means!" said Arthur, striking the water with his paddle. "Two days of canoeing are enough, even with an exciting bear hunt included. I'd like to take part in something not quite so dangerous but just as thrilling."

"And I should like to see Prince Royal, Leveller, and Jack's nag follow the pack," exclaimed Paul.

"Then why not go for coyotes?" asked Walter. "I should like to see the black run, myself."

"I don't believe Harry's well enough to ride for a while," said Arthur, "and I think it would be a

good plan to have him remain at the lodge. I'll ride Prince Royal, for he'll need the exercise."

"And so shall I," continued his brother, with a wink at his companions. "When shall we start?"

"Early in the morning, for they take to the brush and cover, or lie upon the side of high hills later in the day," answered Walter. "Is it all settled?"

The others assented heartily as the canoes were made fast and the skin was rolled upon the wharf. Walter and Eugene carried it up the bank, the others following. Tony was idly watching Pietro groom the gallant Prince Royal, and did not hear the lads until the greyhounds and setters set up an impatient yelp of recognition, at which he turned and caught sight of Walter, Eugene, and the bear's skin.

"For de lan's sake!" cried the old negro, backing behind the hostler and showing the whites of his eyes. "Pietry, Pietry, what you goin' to do with such young marssers? Dey's gone and killed a bob-tailed bear, sure as I'm livin'. Dey'll be ropin' panthers 'fore long, 'deed dey will."

The lads, proud of their achievement, dropped the skin just outside the stable door. Prince Royal, upon catching sight of it, reared and kicked viciously.

"He hasn't forgotten Harry's wildcat hunt," said Eugene, casting an admiring glance at the clean-limbed, glossy black. "We're going to ride the ranges to-morrow, Pietro."

"I'm glad to hear it," answered the hostler, knocking his curry-comb against the stable door. "The hosses are as restless as so many two year olds. I'll have them all shinin' like silk to-morrer, and Tony'll be sparin' with his corn-bread for the hounds. But that's a great hide you have, Master Walter. Did he take a deal of killin'?"

"Indeed he did, Pietro, but everything came out all right. He got after me, and there was so little daylight between us that the fellows were afraid to shoot often."

"Made you run, did he!" exclaimed Pietro, with a twinkle in his eye. "Tell us how you found him."

So Walter went on and told the morning's adventure, to which Pietro and Tony listened with the closest attention. He explained how the bear must have doubled on the trail, and how wonderfully swift and sure his movements had been. Tony never said a word, but showed the whites of his eyes continually, and occasionally brushed an imaginary speck of dust from his immaculate suit of duck. Pietro showed how astonished he was by drawing briskly at his pipe, now and then uttering a short exclamation of approval or alarm. When Walter had finished, the herdsman led Prince Royal to his stall, saying as he did so:—

"Well, Master Walter, I'd like to say that I think you and your friends are chips of the old block, and

that you did a heap better than a lot of men I've known who have hunted these hills a'most their whole lives. It was gritty to trail him up that way, and I'm inclined to think you can look after yourselves most anywhere."

"Thank you, Pietro," answered Walter. "What are the chances of getting a shot at some wolves to-night?"

"Very good. Where did you leave the carcass?"

"Where it fell. You don't suppose we could move it, do you?"

"I don't know. Is it in the open, or in timber?"

"Just at the edge of the willows, in plain sight from the hill."

"Well, the breeze is blowing from the south, so you'll be able to get some shots by coming up on the other side. The coyotes will come down from the cliffs at dusk, and they'll be thick enough to cover the ground. Take plenty of shells, for you'll have lots of sport if the moon comes out."

"How many of you fellows are too tired to go?" asked Walter.

"None! None!" yelled the lads in response.

"Then we'll start after supper," said Walter.

"Shall we take the dogs?" inquired Paul.

"No; they're too fast for the woods, and can't see the trees."

The other arrangements were completed dur-

ing the course of the afternoon. Pietro thought it best to go again in the canoes, as they led directly to the spot; and, as he further stated, there would be less chance of alarming the wolves, which had learned to fear horses as well as men.

"Tony seems to have recovered entirely from the shock of the bear hunt," said Jack at supper, reaching to the centre of the table, "for these biscuits are simply great. I believe I'll take some with me."

"No, you don't, Jack," said Harry, removing the plate from his friend's reach. "You've got to fire your Winchester, to-night; can't have any statues about. Who knows but what we'll meet another bear, or perhaps a panther. Halloo! What's that?" he concluded, looking out of the open window.

"A horseman," answered Paul; "and he's come a long way."

"Yes, clear from the ranch. That's one of father's cowboys, for I know the white pony," added Walter.

"What do you suppose he's after?" asked Eugene, following the boys as they gathered upon the veranda.

"Probably a message from Uncle John about the stolen cattle," replied Walter. "That pony's ready to drop."

The boys watched the weary ranchero as he rode slowly towards the lodge. The man had removed

his sombrero, for the sun had gone down and the air was beginning to cool. The pony was sore-footed and lame, and acted as though he had been ridden the long distance in a short time.

"Well, you've had a long ride, Larraby," said Walter, by way of greeting. "Get down and have something to eat. Any news?"

"Thanks," replied the cow-puncher, slinging himself from the saddle, "'twas a bit too much to do since noon. The colonel sends a letter and your uncle a package, and tells me to fetch up here before dark."

"Anything happened?" asked the boys, anxiously.

"Nothin' much," Larraby answered, with a shrug of his shoulders. "Here they are," he concluded, drawing a letter and an oblong box from his saddle-bag.

The boys looked at each other inquiringly, as Walter took the letter and broke the seal.

"Fellows!" he exclaimed a moment after, as he glanced hastily down the sheet, "the Santa Fé express was robbed the night before last! This is what father says:—

MY DEAR WALTER: I am sorry to say that the outlaws have made another fearless and successful attack upon the Dallas Express. It occurred two nights ago—the night of the storm, and nothing whatever has been heard from them since. Uncle John tells me that Harry purchased a horse

from Cabrillo, and that you have seen something of the outlaws. I do not believe they would think of making you any trouble, for you have nothing of value with you, and, in all probability, they have plenty of guns of their own.

The enclosed clipping from the *Kansas City Star*, which has just arrived, leads me to believe that they are hiding somewhere in the vicinity of Grouse creek, and so I write to advise you of the existing condition of affairs. I do not like to call you home, as Uncle John tells me you are having such enjoyable times with your horses and dogs. You will show this letter and clipping to the boys, so that they may understand with whom they might possibly meet. With very kind wishes, I remain,

Your affectionate father,

CHARLES WALTER HILLMAN.

"Well, doesn't that beat everything!" exclaimed Harry in great surprise. "Robbed a train!"

"Yes, here's the clipping!" said Walter, taking the narrow slip from the envelope. "I'll tell you what's a fact, fellows, we're in for some lively times if we stay here!"

"That's what you are!" put in Larraby, as much interested as the others. "Them fellers shoot like pizen, and they'll get your last spur."

"I guess they won't, either," replied Harry, confidently. "Read the clipping, Walt."

The boys, Tony, Pietro, and Larraby, gathered about Walter as he read the following:—

[Special to the *Star*.]

CABRILLO, KING OF OUTLAWS!

The Dallas Express Held up for Forty Thousand Dollars by
Six Men

ROBBERS ESCAPE

BORDER CITY, July 11, 189-.

Word has just come from Linwood, a station one hundred and thirty miles below here, to the effect that the Dallas express, which leaves Border City at nine each evening, was held up by José Cabrillo, otherwise known as Wild Face, at Pawnee river about midnight, and robbed of nearly forty thousand dollars. The train left Border City in charge of Conductor Sanders at nine o'clock last night, and made the run through the storm to Pawnee river on time. As the train came to a full stop at the water tank this side of the river, two men boarded the engine and instantly bound Engineer Clark and Fireman Larkin, hand and foot. Almost at the same instant, other bandits flung themselves upon the different platforms with a volley of shots, and the terrified passengers submitted at once. The telegram from Linwood states that Cabrillo went through the train under guard, and that he found everything of value. The outlaws did their work quickly, and the train was soon after started up, run across the bridge and down the track a mile, where it was left by the bandits. As soon as Conductor Sanders became satisfied that the robbers had left, he went to the engine, severed the cords which bound the engineer and fireman, and the train was backed across the river. While the en-

gine was at the tank, the crew and a few of the passengers mustered up courage enough to brave the wind and rain and explore both sides of the river in the vicinity of the hold-up. It is fortunate they did so, for one of the passengers stumbled upon a man named Jackson, who is employed by the company as a track-walker. Jackson was in terrible shape, and could not speak a word for an hour. He states that, upon approaching the bridge, he heard some horses neighing, and left the track a moment. He had not gone far before he was hailed by a man, was struck with something heavy from behind, and that was the last he knew.

It is thought that Cabrillo and his men will keep to the creek bottoms until they reach the Grouse hills, where they are comparatively safe.

This is one of the boldest train robberies ever known, and will undoubtedly induce the Sante Fé officials to offer a large reward for the capture of the criminals and the recovery of the treasure. The Wells-Fargo people say that the loss to the company cannot fall below fifteen thousand dollars, as very little non-negotiable paper was taken. All is excitement here to-night. Searching parties are being formed every hour, and it is safe to say that five hundred people will be upon Cabrillo's trail by nightfall. The robbers are well acquainted with the Grouse hills, however, and will make a desperate resistance. At the hour of going to press, nothing more had been heard from Linwood or Border City.

"Now, what do you think of 'em?" asked Larraby, loosening his saddle-girth and leading his pony towards the barn. "Aren't they a dandy lot?"

"Much good will their ill-gotten gains do them!" said Walter, taking up the oblong box before referred to. "Why, this is for you, Harry. What can it be?" he concluded, breaking the twine and handing the box to his chum.

"I haven't any idea," replied Harry, tearing off the cover and thereby displaying a magnificent brace of hammerless pistols.

"Aren't they beauties!" exclaimed the club in chorus. "Hurrah again for Uncle John!"

"That's for nearly loosing your life with the wild-cat," said Jack. "Uncle John thinks you need them."

"Whether he does or not, it was very kind of him. I shall use them to-night."

"We are to go, then?" asked Paul.

"Yes, indeed," answered Harry. "I believe I should prefer to ride, however. The horses need work."

"Then we shall all ride," said Walter. "Saddle up, fellows, and let's be going. Would you like to join us, Larraby?" continued Walter, addressing the cowboy as the lads reached the stable in a group. "We have an extra pony, if you care to go."

"Not to-night, Master Walter. I'm a little stiff after the ride. I'll have a chat with Pietro, and then I'll turn in."

"Very well—as you like," the lad answered.

Soon after the boys, assisted by Pietro, commenced to saddle their respective mounts.

"You were thinkin' of ridin' the black, Master Harry?" asked the hostler, glancing into Prince Royal's stall. "He's feeling pretty well, but you can't tell what he'll do at night, and you'd feel better on the pony. I don't believe it'll show much moon to-night."

"Well, saddle the pony, then," said Harry, in reply. "We'll leave the horses back from the trail, Pietro. The coyotes won't get near enough to scent them."

"I guess not, either," replied the good-natured herdsman. "They're pretty thick during the nights, and hard to hit on the run."

"Good! A little practice won't do us any harm. Hey, Walt?" said the irrepressible Jack.

"Not a bit. Have you all your Winchesters?"

"Every one," answered Arthur. "Keep the dogs shut up for fifteen minutes, Pietro, or they'll be after us."

"Right you are, sir!"

The boys wheeled, galloping around the lodge and down the prairie. The air had cooled with the setting of the sun, and a fresh evening breeze had again sprung up from the south. The chirping of the crickets filled the air as the shadows of night began to envelop the woodland and prairie. The impatient tread of the animals soon brought the lads

upon a sort of game path that led along the bank. It was not very wide, but well trodden, and the lads followed it as best they could until the moon appeared and struck down upon it in a straight white line. Then the stars studded the heavens, and the rolling stretch of prairie shone with the pale yellow light. The lads rode on in silence until they reached a group of trees in plain sight of the peak-crowned hill, at whose base they had slain the silver-tip that very morning, and then they dismounted and fastened their horses.

"I'm glad we forded the stream below the cove," said Walter, as the boys bunched together for a short consultation; "for the wind has already changed. Hear that wolf howl? Quietly, now, and we'll have some sport."



CHAPTER X

FIREFLY IS TAKEN

THE lads worked their way towards the glade at a rapid walk. They were all very anxious to have a shot at a wolf in the moonlight, as it was a new sport to them, and they gave no thought to the horses after the animals had been fastened to the trees. The wind had again slightly changed, so the lads kept close to the stream until they had arrived within a few hundred feet of the cove, when they turned sharply to the left and followed a winding path that shone with the silver lustre of the moon. The cries of the coyotes came often to them now, and they trembled with excitement, as the edge of the willows was reached, and they caught sight of the swampish glade framed in the darkness of the trees. The peak-crowned hill rose high above them on their right, while the carcass of the silver-tip, just visible through the trees, was the chief object of interest on their left. The soft, summer-night wind stirred the air pleasantly, and everything pointed towards a capital night's sport. The lads stretched themselves at full length behind the great trunk of a dead cottonwood and pushed their rifles before them,

Presently the silhouette of a coyote was seen against the brown of the shadow thrown by one of the towering peaks. A clump of bushes was just behind him, at the edge of which other animals were seen to move.

"They've detected the smell of the carcass," said Walter, peering into the shadow of the cliff; "but are not quite sure that everything's all right. Halloo! What's that?" he concluded, pointing slantwise towards the left.

"Another coyote," answered Harry. "He's making for the carcass at a trot. It's well the wind is blowing straight down the glade."

"Very. Don't shoot, fellows; there will be others in the open before long."

Accordingly the lads held their cocked rifles to their shoulders in silence. The first coyote, just before he reached the carcass, turned and glanced hastily behind him. The boys had an excellent chance to fire, but, impatient as they were to begin the fun, wisely restrained themselves from so doing. And they were very glad, a few moments later, that they did so, for they were treated to an unexpected battle that was worth a dozen shots at deer. As the animal reached the carcass, and began almost at once to feed, a large gray wolf appeared in the broad band of moonlight far down the glade. He, too, stopped long enough to assure himself that all was right, and

then came running up to the dead bear. Another second and there was a most savage growling.

"Tut, tut!" exclaimed Walter, as Harry covered the wolf. "They're going to fight. Down with the guns!"

Instantly the whole glade became alive with growls and cries that fairly made the boys tremble. The coyote, a large male, had backed from the carcass, where he stood awaiting the wolf's approach, snarling and snapping as only a coyote can. The next moment they came together with a most furious crash, their eyes and teeth alone shining in the light. Down went the coyote all in a heap, and over him plunged the wolf. With a most amazing quickness, the smaller animal struck at the wolf's throat, and the cry that followed told the lads that he had not missed his mark. Then the wolf struck at the coyote's throat, and they rolled, snapping, snarling, fighting tooth and nail, out from the shadow of the trees. First one, then the other would seem to have a slight advantage, until the cries of the poor coyote were pitiful to hear.

"Shall we shoot, Walt? He's whipped!" cried the club.

"Not yet. See! his cries have brought others. When they come within good range, let them have it."

Sure enough, the coyotes had charged out into the

glade in a body, moving with their well-known swiftness of foot, and were soon uttering the most mournful yelps, as they raced about their worsted comrade, too cowardly to come to his assistance. A fairer chance for a shot is seldom presented. They kept running about in the glade, avoiding the bushes as though they feared another encounter with one of their deadly enemies.

"Ready, fellows!" said Walter, rising to his knees and covering the wolf as he was finishing the coyote. "Shoot often and rapidly, for they'll soon be gone!"

The six rifles spoke almost at once. The gray wolf dropped to his knees, three of the running coyotes dropped in their tracks, while a fourth crawled under a clump of bushes, showing how well the lads had aimed. The others wheeled and fled up the hillside. They crossed the low land like so many greyhounds, and were soon plunging up the sides of the cliff. Their legs were not visible in the long grass, and their dark forms, as they moved so swiftly, were anything but easy chances with a Winchester.

"There they go, Harry!" cried Walter, rising to his feet and drawing on the nearest animal. "There's the chance to make a reputation!"

The others thought so, too, and were covering the flying coyotes in another second. Bang! spoke Walter's rifle, but the animal did not swerve a whit from its course. Eugene and Arthur fired, too, with

a like result. The others could not seem to level their weapons satisfactorily, and did not fire at once. Paul watched the coyote Walter had missed, until it emerged from the tall grass and offered a fair shot. The others had done their shooting, and were content to watch Paul's try at the last animal in sight. The lad covered the swiftly moving form with his Winchester for a moment, and then pulled the trigger. The bullet landed with a faint thud, and with a death yelp over rolled the coyote, just like a shot rabbit.

"Through the head or heart, I'll stake my life," said Walter with enthusiasm. "Paul, that's the best shot I ever saw!"

"Right you are, Walt!" the others cried. "Hurrah for the little fellow!"

"Yes, and there's not enough light to tell his head from his tail," added Arthur, when the cheer for "the little fellow" had been given with a will.

There was a good deal of satisfaction and fun during the following quarter hour. The gray wolf and coyotes were gathered together and their hides removed, and the coyote that had crawled under the bushes was driven out and killed after a couple of shots from Harry's handsome pistols. As nothing more was seen or heard of the wolves, the lads determined to return to camp, and so Eugene and Harry started for the horses. They discussed the fight between the wolves thoroughly on their way down

stream, ending the conversation by agreeing that Paul's last shot was the best they had ever seen.

In a few moments they were quite close to the nags, probably within a couple of hundred yards, but the brush was dense, and they could see nothing of them. They hunted around for the clump of trees, but, as the moon had disappeared behind a bank of clouds, they were unable to determine just where they were.

"I believe we've gone past the horses, Harry," said Eugene, with more earnestness than the occasion seemed to demand. "What would the fellows say, if some one had run them off?"

"You mean Cabrillo?"

"Yes, perhaps they lamed their horses the other night, and are looking for others. It would be just like them," concluded Eugene, unconsciously lowering his voice to a whisper as he followed Harry about the woods.

"Bosh, Gene!" exclaimed the other, as they came in sight of the oaks and cottonwoods. "There are the trees! What's the mat —"

Harry did not finish the sentence, for Eugene caught his arm in a grasp that well-nigh brought forth a cry of pain.

"What's the matter?" repeated Eugene, in a hoarse whisper. "See there!"

Harry looked towards the trees and saw what had

so frightened his chum. The horses were stamping restlessly about, now and then uttering a shrill neigh.

"Some one's there!" agreed Harry, moving sideways out of the light as the moon reappeared. "Did you see anything before?"

"Yes; a light was struck for a moment before you looked. See, there goes another!"

"What are we going to do? Get the fellows?"

"No, we haven't time," answered Eugene. "He'd take the horses while we're gone. Let's not separate."

"And why does he wait?" asked Harry, breathlessly.

"He isn't waiting," replied Eugene, quickly. "There! He has struck another match," he concluded, as a faint light glowed duskily for a moment and then went out.

"He's moving about among the horses. What can he be after?"

"A certain horse, in my opinion, or the best of the bunch. See, he's holding the lighted matches to the horses' heads!"

"Yes; and he's satisfied at last. If he has one of the ponies, let him alone, for we must remember what we promised Uncle John."

The man led the horse away from the others, tightening the saddle-girth with a bungling hand.

The lads, almost too astonished to speak, watched his every movement with the closest attention.

"What horse has he?" asked Harry. "I can't determine."

"Neither can I, though it isn't one of the ponies. He's too large for that."

"Then it's either Leveller or Blue Rocket. I can't tell which."

"I think it's Leveller," said Eugene. "I just saw one white foot."

"So did I, and the blaze in his face," Harry replied. "We can't allow that, Gene; it will break Walt all up!"

"What shall we do then?"

"Stay just where we are. Here he comes."

"How are we to act?"

"I'll throw him out of the saddle from this side, and you clap a pistol to his head. There's only one, and he won't expect it," answered Harry.

While the boys waited for the rider to approach, they could plainly hear the throbbing of their hearts, and were conscious that their hands were anything but still.

"He isn't very big," said Harry, by the way of encouragement. "I believe we can do it."

"Very well; I'm with you," Eugene replied, all in a breath.

It was dark there in the shadow of the trees, and

the boys were sure they could not be seen. The man guided the horse up the path at a slow walk, and his leisurely movements did not in any way soothe the lads' ruffled feelings.

"He thinks he has nothing to fear," they soliloquized; "but we'll show him something that will surprise him."

The boys did surprise him, for while the man was peering idly ahead and drawing at a corn-cob pipe, he felt himself hurled from his saddle and his two arms seized from behind almost before he knew it. Harry had executed one of his lightning-like movements, and the man realized, as he felt the cold muzzle of Eugene's pistol under his ear, that he was dealing with wide-awake young men. After Harry had thrown the fellow from the saddle, with an agility that would have done credit to a member of a university foot-ball team, he dodged under Leveller's nose, as the horse reared on his hind legs, and flung himself upon the thief, pinning him to the ground with his knee and holding his arms in an iron grip, while Eugene pointed a revolver at the man's head.

"Keep your mouth shut, you clumsy horse-thief!" whispered Harry, fiercely. "Eugene, shoot if he moves."

But Eugene did not shoot, for the man struggled desperately, like a madman, and was upon his knees in a moment. With a violent oath, he freed his arms

from Harry's vice-like grip and staggered to his feet, reaching for his pistol as he did so. He was too late, however, for Harry closed with him on the instant, and they went down together.

"Don't shoot, Gene!" cried the lad, hoarsely, choking the breath out of the man's body. "He's been drinking hard. Get a bridle to tie his arms behind him. Where's Leveller?"

"He galloped up the path. Wait a minute; I have a lasso on my saddle."

"Then get it quickly."

Eugene was gone but a moment, returning with the rope. "Here it is," he said.

"Wind it about his legs first," directed Harry.

As the man felt the coil of rope tighten about his limbs, he made a last attempt to free himself, and then sank back with a horrible oath upon his lips.

"What shall we do with him?" asked Eugene, when the task of securing the thief was completed to Harry's satisfaction.

"Do with him?" repeated Harry, looking the man over as best he could. "I believe this is one of Cabrillo's men."

As the lad said this, the man let another volley of oaths escape him, and then cried, "Jim! Redwood!" and other names in a thick voice; "you won't let 'em take old Bill—not your old mate?" ending with a drunken laugh, as though he thought it a good joke.

Just then the noise of a galloping horse attracted the lads' attention, and Leveller came in sight, carrying Walter and Paul, the others following at a full run.

"What's happened, fellows, did the horses break loose?" asked Walter, almost before he had dismounted.

"One of them did," was the answer. "See for yourselves."

As Harry said this, he grasped the drunken outlaw about the waist and rolled him from the shadow of a thicket out into the moonlight. The lads drew back, with much astonishment written on their faces and perhaps a little fear also.

"Oh, don't be afraid, fellows," said Eugene, as the wild, reckless, blood-shot eyes of the bandit fell upon them. "This fellow has been disappointed at not getting safely away with Walt's horse. Harry executed another one of his electric movements, and you see the result. Don't mind the curses, fellows, for they're thrown in at regular intervals."

"He's the toughest-looking object I ever saw," said Jack, after the boys had heard the story in detail. "Have you searched him?"

"Not yet. Perhaps it would be a good plan."

Drunk as the man was, he tried every means in his power to prevent Harry from rifling his pockets, ending by crying out like a baby.

"Don't take my money, lads," he pleaded; "it's all I have in the world. I'll give you the 'yellow-boys' for the galloper."

"I've no doubt you will," replied Harry; "but that won't do."

"What's the reason it won't? Make it five hundred, if you like, lads."

"Not much; we think we know who you are."

"Ah!" sighed the defeated bandit, and that was all he said.

Harry was not slow to remove the contents of the man's pockets. Surprised and delighted as the boys had been upon seeing the outlaw so securely bound hand and foot, unable to move a muscle, they were now nearly bewildered as Harry tossed into the well-worn trail the heaps of gold coin and precious stones, which shone and glittered in the moonlight as only pure gold and white diamonds can.

"We understood you made a successful trip the other night," said Harry, removing the remaining coins and placing everything of value in his saddle-bag, which Arthur brought to him. "It was very careless of you to take such risks."

The man made no reply for a moment or two, and then stared wildly about and said in a hoarse whisper, as though he were imparting some great secret, "Rum, my lads, rum did it — Cabrillo's rum!"

Never before had the lads been so satisfied with a day's sport. They had killed a bear, five coyotes, and a gray wolf since morning, and had been fortunate enough to capture a member of one of the most notorious bands of outlaws that ever existed. They had passed through some very trying moments, and had come out of each adventure with flying colors. The thought that a real live outlaw lay but a few feet away, caused them to remember the distance to the lodge, and make preparations for the start accordingly.

The outlaw's legs were freed, and he was placed upon Leveller in front of Walter. The others mounted and kept as much as possible on all sides of the bandit, for they feared almost any kind of an outbreak from such a character. The ride to the cove was made without incident, however, and the skins were tied behind the saddles with leather thongs.

"We'll ride back on this side of the creek," said Walter, "for the prairie's much flatter, and there's a good ford just below the lodge."

It was fortunate that Walter decided to do this, or perhaps the boys would not have reached the lodge that night; for Cabrillo and his men were searching faithfully for the deserter on the other side of the stream, and were in no very amiable frame of mind, you may be sure. The chief had left early in the

evening for a little outing, and during his absence the men broke into his closet and removed the keg of whiskey. With no one to restrain them, they drank freely, and were soon under the influence of the liquor. A wrangle followed, in which Cabrillo was loudly abused for not having better things to eat, now that they had successfully held up the express. During the discussion, Firefly, under the pretence of watching for the captain, slipped off into the night and was seen no more. Firefly stood in deadly fear of José with the rest of the band, and, though the liquor was beginning to take effect, he kept instinctively to the bed of the stream, walking some miles below the retreat. He laughed loudly to himself, as he thought of the contents of his pockets, and told himself it was about time to desert the band.

"They'll be rounded up there like so many yearlin's in a cow-pen," he said, crawling out upon the bank to his right and removing a small dark-red bottle from his hip pocket. "And where'll I be? In Mexico, maybe, or Orleans. I'll fool 'em, I will," he concluded, finishing the contents of the small bottle. Then the worthy bandit fumbled in his pockets for tobacco, and not finding any, fell into a drunken sleep.

After a short sleep, the outlaw was awakened by the reports of Winchester rifles. He opened his eyes at once, and was startled by the proximity of

the creek, for he had slept but a few feet from the water's edge.

"Old Grouse must have risen las' night," he soliloquized, staring at the water. "We used to be a hundred feet above it, and now it's a'most level." Then, remembering that he was a deserter, and how he had come to fall asleep, he laughed heartily, after which he endeavored to collect his scattered wits and rise to an upright position. He was unable to do this at first, for his head pained him, and he was unsteady on his feet.

"Wonder what woke me up," he soliloquized. "Must have been those kids José won't scatter. They make me tired with their fancy guns and fishin' poles and cloth dug-outs!"

At this moment the report of Paul's rifle rang high into the night as he made his crack shot at the running coyote, and the cheer he received a moment later told Firefly that he had reasoned correctly. This was followed by the shrill neighing of the horses, which caused the outlaw to finally stumble to his feet and grope his way in the direction of the sound. He was nearer the horses than he at first supposed, and was soon endeavoring to select one to his liking.

"If Jim's black is among 'em," he said, striking match after match and holding them to the horses' heads, "then I must be blind."

We have seen how he eventually selected Leveller, and how he was thrown to the ground and bound by Harry and Eugene in a twinkling.

"I'd like to know what Pietro and Larraby will say of the night's fun," said Jack, riding close behind Walter and the outlaw. "Tired as I am, I believe I'll sit up and hear their opinions."

"We're all just as anxious to know as you," replied Paul. "But I am more anxious to know what Uncle John will think of it. It will probably get into the papers, and we shall be called home."

"Don't you believe it," said Harry, confidently. "Uncle John isn't built that way."

The boys conversed in this strain until they crossed the creek and came in sight of the lodge. Pietro, Larraby, and Tony were seated upon the rustic front steps, enjoying their pipes and waiting for the lads to put in an appearance. As the boys rode up, the men caught sight of Leveller and his double burden, and their eyes also detected the presence of the lariat that secured the outlaw's arms to his back. They were so surprised that they could not speak for some moments, and then they only found words enough to ask the whole story from beginning to end. Pietro was very severe, and said it was very foolish; but, if the truth must be told, he secretly admired the boys' pluck from the bottom of his heart.

The lamps in the lodge-room were lighted, and the

prisoner was carried into the house. For the first time, the boys had a good view of the man's haggard face. It bore all the terrible marks of dissipation and a wild, reckless life, and the lads pitied him thoroughly. Larraby was the first to speak.

"You haven't quit this night-ridin' yet, hey, Fire-fly?" he said sternly, looking down upon the man as he lay stretched like a corpse upon the floor. "You and I have this little account to settle," he said, pointing to a bullet mark upon his right forearm. "That shot from the brush cost me a deal of time and trouble."

"It weren't me, nohow," growled the man, with an oath.

"It makes no difference which one it was; it came from your side, and I swore I'd get even. I'll be the one to see that you're put where you belong. You'll find your life cut short off when the tree's beginnin' to bud. It don't pay, Slader, and you should have found it out afore the other night."

The outlaw winced perceptibly at this, but made no reply. Harry counted the gold and silver he had taken from the robber, and took a memorandum of the jewels and precious stones. The lads then held a short consultation, and decided to have the outlaw carried up-stairs and placed in a bunk opposite those occupied by Pietro and Tony. Larraby was also given a bunk in the same room. Without further

delay, Larraby and Pietro caught up the outlaw and ascended the stairs, followed by a very tired lot of boys. The excitement of the day did not keep them awake many minutes, for they soon fell into a dreamless sleep, with the hoot of an owl or the song of the crickets ringing in their ears.



CHAPTER XI

THE OUTLAWS FOILED

WHEN Cabrillo and his men returned to their retreat after their unsuccessful hunt for the deserter Firefly, they were in no very good humor, and ready to do almost anything. The chief of the outlaws had all along considered it dangerous to leave the country so soon after the hold-up, and his men had faithfully promised not to desert. They knew, however, about when Cabrillo would leave for one of his "outings," as he called his frequent departures from camp, and they were determined to enjoy the contents of the brown keg during his absence. The stout iron bar was taken from the door that guarded the entrance to the retreat, and Cabrillo's closet was opened at once. The outlaws sat about upon the grass, drinking and smoking, and did not notice Firefly's disappearance for some time.

"He'll be enjoyin' that small bottle he found in the cap'n's chest about this time," said Redwood.

"What'll the cap'n say with no one on the rocks with the spy-glass?"

"He won't say nothin'," growled Dody. "He

won't be back afore mornin'. He's always out enjoyin' himself."

But in this the worthy Tarcedo was far from right, for Cabrillo appeared among them most unexpectedly and unpleasantly.

"That's what I get for turnin' my back on you for an hour at a time," he cried savagely. "You'll get no more rum, you can bank on that. Where's the lookout, and where's Firefly?"

"Firefly's gone," answered Jim, in a voice like a crow's. "He said to-day he was gettin' plum sick of layin' to like a dory at anchor."

"No; he ain't left nuther, cap'n," answered Snaky. "He got an extry bottle and has gone to tap it."

"There won't be no more such business," the chief replied, kicking the spigot from the cask. He watched the brown liquor run out upon the grass, and then he mounted the bowlders with the telescope. Keen as must have been his disappointment and anger, he nevertheless controlled his feelings as he took a careful view of the surrounding country, his men watching him narrowly. When he had satisfied himself that all was well, or was not well, he descended among them and lighted a cigarette.

"Now, men," he said, in voice that fairly trembled with excitement and anger, "Firefly's given us the go-by, and we'll have to scatter out and round him

up. There's no tellin' what he'll do or say if they find him now, and if he falls in with those marshals, he'll go state's evidence without a word, while we'll be hunted down and shot like so many rats in a corner."

"You're right, cap'n," answered Redwood. "You know your business, and we're with you, every time."

"Thanks, my man. Will you kindly saddle the nags?"

Redwood arose at once and walked to the corral.

"Another half hour," Cabrillo continued, "and you'd have been singin' and shriekin'. You must think precious little of your lives, to start the odds against you that way."

"Ask your pardon, sir, but the men say the grub's lackin' flavor," said Jim, "and the camp's a bit close on days like these. They've got the money, they say, and precious little use it is to 'em, now that they've got it."

"It's no use to so many fools — that, nor nothin'," cried the chief. "But, now, you look here ; you've gone and tapped the keg without so much as hintin' that you were a bit dry, and we're minus a man, as a consequence. Mark my words : Unless we scatter out and round Bill up to-night, you can lay to it that I'll quit you all at sunrise. Here's Pete with the nags. Are you with me?"

"What'll you do with Bill's greenbacks?" asked

Jim, casting his solitary eye upon José. "Do we get any of 'em?"

"To be sure, you do. He's not fit to be trusted with 'em, and will have to yield up half the roll," replied the leader, mounting his bay. "We've got to enforce the rules of this camp, some way or other, or it'll be overrun with sight-seers, come another fortnight."

That was all Cabrillo had to say. The men mounted at once, and a thorough search of the surrounding hills and trails was made; but nothing, as we know, was seen of the missing Firefly. Cabrillo heard the reports of the boys' rifles, and rightly guessed them to be shooting wolves over the carcass of the bear they had killed during the morning.

"A tip-top time to close in on that fancy log-camp," said Tarcedo, who was beginning to tire of the search through the dark thickets. "It's my opinion Firefly's stone drunk in some out-of-the-way place. Why not have a try for those pickles and pressed meats to-night, cap'n?"

Not more than a mile below the outlaws, on the other side of the stream, Firefly was at that moment being bound hand and foot by Eugene and Harry. If the men had suspected anything of the sort, the lads would have had an encounter that would have left bear hunts and wildcat surprises far in the shade. But the outlaws had no reason to suspect that Fire-

fly had fallen into the hands of the young sportsmen, and, after an hour's fruitless search, much to Cabrillo's disappointment, they followed their chief back to the retreat. As we have said, they were in no very good humor, and were ready to carry out Tarcedo's proposition of robbing Deer Lodge. After an hour or two, during which the men smoked in silence, Snaky spoke out:—

"What are you goin' to do about strippin' that shootin' camp, cap'n?"

"Anything you like," replied the chief, gruffly. "If you've made up your minds, don't dilly-dally about. See that your pistols are in good shape, for those lads know a thing or two about shootin', themselves."

"All's well, and the moon rides cloud-banked," said Tarcedo, mounting with the rest. "Isn't it a little early, cap'n?"

"Not if we ride slowly. We'll have to keep to the creek bottom all the way up."

The outlaws entered the creek and guided their horses up the stream. The rattle of a bit and the gurgle of the water, as the horses tramped along, alone broke the stillness of the quiet night.

"You lads'll remember that there's a puncher and nigger cook under the roof, and that they'll need attention first," said Cabrillo, in a low voice, as they neared the last bend in the stream.

"Ay, ay, cap'n," they replied in the same guarded tone. "We'll do the job well."

"Mind you do, or you'll have stale bread and water in place of your pickles and pressed meats; and *that's* worse than broiled steer."

"Right you are again, cap'n," returned Redwood; "but here's the camp."

"Keep in the shadows, men, for the moon's goin' to show," cautioned Cabrillo.

As he spoke, a bank of clouds slid from the face of the moon, and the light fell upon and silvered the dark water. The outlaws wheeled to the right quickly, but not quickly enough to avoid being detected by a keen pair of eyes that watched from the veranda at Deer Lodge.

Pietro, after endeavoring for a couple of hours to get some sleep, left his bunk and descended the stairs for a quiet smoke. The more he thought over the capture of Bill Slader the outlaw, the less he liked it.

"If they happened to see the boys tote him off," he soliloquized, "they'll be down here in a bunch before mornin'. I believe I'd ought to get Larraby up and stand a watch with him. I know Wild Face and his band are hidin' in the hills, and will be for some time. They've made the divide, or Firefly never would have had that four thousand with him. Halloo! Some one in the creek!" continued the hostler, as he

caught sight of the robbers in the moonlight. "And they don't want to be seen."

Pietro jumped to his feet and ran up the stairs without another word.

"Larry, Larry, get up!" he whispered to the cowboy, shaking him by the arm. "The band's comin' up the creek in the shadow. Hurry!"

Larraby comprehended the hostler's words at once, and slid into his trousers and boots in less time than it takes to tell it. In the mean time, Pietro slipped across the hall and entered the boys' room.

"Master Walter, get out quickly! We're in for some trouble with Cabrillo's men!" he said, loud enough to awaken the other sleepers. "They're comin' up the creek on this side."

"Who? where? what creek?" Walter asked, rubbing his tired eyes and endeavoring to grasp the meaning of Pietro's words.

"I say that the outlaws are stealin' a march on us," replied the hostler, going to the window and looking down the creek. "I saw them a few moments ago just below us in the bed of the stream."

"You did!" exclaimed the others, who were by this time busily engaged in pulling on their clothes.

"Yes; five or six of 'em. I've been sittin' up on the lookout for a while. I thought perhaps they'd be back after Firefly."

"Good for you, Pietro," said Harry, as he buckled

on his belt and loaded his pistols. "Have you told Larraby?"

"To be sure; he and Tony are already up."

"What are we going to do?" asked Paul, who had found his tongue at last.

"Stand our ground. They can't see us, and we can see nearly every move they make."

"They're trailin' through the grass," said Larraby, as he joined the excited group. "You can see them from the window here."

The boys rushed to the window and looked down upon the prairie. The moon shone quite clearly, rendering objects nearly as plain as day.

"There!" continued the cowboy. "They're on all-fours, and are cutting off towards the lodge."

The lads looked in the direction indicated, and made out five men crawling through the grass towards the camp. They moved quickly, and were fast approaching the lodge.

"Rifles!" cried Pietro, as the men continued to advance. "Double quick, my hearties! We must give them a warm reception. Not a sound until you have the word, now mind."

The lads ran rapidly down the stairs, filled the magazines of their rifles, and stood waiting and watching each movement made by the creeping bandits. Sometimes their backs could be seen quite plainly, while at other times they would remain from sight alto-

gether for several moments, reappearing far in advance of where they were last seen.

The slopes of the knoll and a portion of the bank had been cleared of the heavy timber to build the lodge, and a few stumps stood directly in the path of the bandits. A couple grew very close together, behind which the outlaws crept, presumably to hold a short consultation.

"Why, do you suppose, they are comin' up together just in front of the door?" asked Larraby, cocking his rifle with a click that sent cold shivers through the boys.

"It must be the dogs," said Pietro. "They're shut up in the stable, and the robbers wish to avoid 'em."

"That's so," added Walter. "Do you suppose they'd be of any use?"

"No; not a whit. We'd have to get out in the light to start them, and I don't propose to make targets of you. We're perfectly safe where we are."

"Yes; but if they come, are we to fire point blank at them?" asked Jack, in a trembling voice.

"Not unless we have to. Don't expose yourselves, and wait for the word. Remember that 'desperate cases require desperate remedies.'"

If the party in the lodge had been required to await the outlaws' approach much longer, they would probably have opened hostilities themselves. Tired as all were when Pietro aroused them, they were now



PIETRO.



wide awake, and realized the importance of making a firm stand.

"What would Uncle John say, if he should hear that, after capturing one of Cabrillo's men, we had allowed him to escape? I, for one, am in favor of returning all that comes," said Harry.

"Then we'll do a deal of firin'," Larraby replied, "for here they come, pushin' their Winchesters before 'em."

"Steady, now," said Pietro. "Lie close to the floor, and when you hear the word, shoot through the windows. The logs under the sills are the heaviest in the lodge, and you'll be safe there."

Pietro's voice was firm and clear, and the boys took courage at once. Tony entered the lodge-room with the lads, as silent as a mouse, while the hostler and Larraby stood in the hall, doggedly determined to settle old accounts and new, and not to fire the first shot to kill.

"Four of 'em have hid in the grass, but the fifth is comin' up," whispered Larraby to the boys.

The boys saw that four of the men seemed to have paused, and perhaps to have rolled into a little hollow, for not only did they cease to draw any nearer, but disappeared entirely from view. The fifth, however, continued to advance, and was soon within a few feet of the steps. The boys watched him breathlessly as he twitched silently along a half-dozen feet at a time,

always taking care that his right hand never left the stock of his Winchester.

The moon beat full upon him. His eyes glowed duskily as he lifted his face and grasped the step — the dark, villanous-looking face of the type of man who has lost all remembrance of the word honor, and who has sunk about as far in disgrace as men ever go. It struck terror to the lads' hearts, and caused them to glance in a kind of appeal at Pietro and Larraby.

The hostler stood on the left side of the door, with his rifle clubbed and upraised, while Larraby stood with his back towards them, a glittering pistol in either hand.

"Here he comes up the steps," said Eugene, and his voice shook like a taut rope.

Crawling on all-fours the man worked his way slowly, silently, steadily up the steps; before he had quite reached the door, he arose to a crouching attitude, and then without so much as a footfall, slid into the lodge. Pietro's gun-stock flashed in the darkness, striking the man right behind the shoulders across his back. He gave a sort of gasp and fell head-foremost with a dull thud.

The lads were fairly appalled, and were utterly at a loss how to act. From their place by the window they had heard Pietro pant aloud as he struck the blow, and had seen him fling himself upon the

defenceless body with the agility of a monkey. Larraby placed his pistols upon the floor and began to wind his sash about the man's mouth and neck, while Pietro bound him hand and foot with his lariat. By this time the lads had sufficiently recovered the use of their senses to go to the hostler's assistance.

"Drag him into the kitchen," the herdsman said to Harry, as the boy joined the trio in the darkness; "and one of you cover him with a pistol. He's only stunned, and will cry out as soon as he comes to."

"Here comes another!" exclaimed Walter, as Jack and Harry dragged the unconscious outlaw from the room. "He's almost upon us."

"As I expected," replied Pietro. "Hold your posts, boys, and be silent."

The lads therefore returned to their positions by the window, and awaited the approach of the second robber. He had advanced much as the first had done, always taking care to keep his rifle slightly before him and ready for immediate use. The boys could plainly hear the thumping of their hearts as the man came forward, and, as they afterwards said, they couldn't have raised their rifles to save their lives. When within a few feet of the steps, the man came to a standstill and almost concealed himself behind a bunch of weeds, only now and then watch-

ing the doorway closely. There he waited for some time, and then started to come forward, but hesitated and turned his ear towards the lodge.

"All right?" he finally asked in little more than a whisper; but the air was so still that his words were distinctly heard by the eager waiters.

"Yes, come on!" Larraby answered, and his voice was strained and awkward, like a rusty lock.

The man sprang to his feet and ran up the steps. The lads were fearful that his sudden movement would take the men off their guard, but in this they were wrong. Down flashed the rifle again, and down again went the robber, but not silently, for one awful, long-drawn scream rang high into the night before Larraby could clap his hand over the intruder's mouth. Pietro's second blow had not been so effective, for the man struggled desperately for some seconds, and then silence reestablished its empire once more; for the villain soon ceased to pant, and the distant howl of a wolf alone disturbed the languor of the summer night.

Cabrillo, Tarcedo, and Jim Osborn leaped from their cover as the wild sound of their comrade's voice reached their ears. It had been wholly unexpected, and, as they had not heard a shot fired, they could account for the cry in only one way, — Snaky had been seen creeping through the grass, and had been struck from behind, as they had often waylaid

and struck down unoffending persons. The outlaws ran to the bank, like a horse at the spur.

"There!" cried Cabrillo, with an oath. "That ends the dance. Redwood and Snaky've gone up." They waited behind a clump of bushes for some moments, when another cry, fainter than the first, sounded from the lodge.

"What's that?" asked Tarcedo. "It sounded like Reddy's voice."

"No, not Reddy's," answered the chief, "but Fire-fly's. Can't you hear him call?"

The men listened intently, while the cry was repeated. "Wild Face, Wild Face, don't leave old Bill for the halter!" it came clear and distinct, with a sort of hopeless intonation. "Don't leave me for the halter, there's a good mate!" He pleaded for a while longer, and then he stopped short off.

"They've got his wind cut off now," said Cabrillo, choking with anger; "and it's precious little I'll do to save him. Redwood and Snaky'll feel the handcuffs through the bungling of that wooden-headed idiot."

At the same moment they descended to the horses, mounted, and were soon splashing down the stream. When they reached their retreat, they threw themselves upon their blankets with a perfect storm of oaths.

"Aren't you goin' to give the boys a helpin' "

hand?" asked Dody of the chief, when the robbers had somewhat smoothed their ruffled feelings with a pipeful of black tobacco. "It don't seem just right to quit 'em, now that those kids have fetched to windward of 'em."

"Aha!" replied José, contemptuously, pointing to the empty keg which had been the cause of all the trouble. "Other things don't seem just right, either. You're a pack of fools, Dody, a pack of fools!"

"But you're not goin' to quit 'em now, cap'n? Not goin' to show old Reddy the cold shoulder?" pleaded Jim, whose heart was also in the right place. "Reddy and Snaky had no means of knowin' that the kids was peepin' at 'em the whole while."

"Well, it's no concern of mine," answered the brigand chief. "I wanted no part in the affair from the very first, only to keep you fools satisfied. I never heard of such a milk-and-water raid before in my life. Holton would have quit such a crowd in less time than it takes to tell it."

"Well, you're not Bill Holton, cap'n, and we don't look for Bill's treatment along of you. You're young, and you're rich, as they say, and you've seen a heap better days than these, Wild Face. And you won't tell us that you'll give old Reddy and Snaky the go-by without liftin' a finger? Not you, cap'n! Many a time they've flung themselves through a train door, and have felt the bullets sing by 'em for —"

"Enough of that!" cried Cabrillo, jumping to his feet and glancing at his watch. "It'll be day-break in another hour, and they'll be settin' out with the boys. It's no use tryin' to ride up to that camp, night or day. We'll have to watch the trails and give them a volley from the brush."

So the outlaws mounted and scattered among the hills, eagerly listening and waiting for any sound of life coming from the direction of the house.

In the mean time, things had gone very smoothly with our heroes at the lodge. The lads saw the three outlaws spring to their feet at the sound of Snaky's voice, saw them pause at the edge of the bank and listen a second to Firefly's cry, and then heard them as they splashed off down the creek bottom. Larraby had seen them, too, and was very much tempted to cover the foremost with his Winchester. He knew that Jim's tall, lank form did not belong to Cabrillo, and, as the chief had not been taken, he must be the first of the three, as the third outlaw wore a heavy beard and was very large.

"Shall I twist a sash around Firefly's mouth?" asked the cowboy, as the outlaw began to call to his comrades from above.

"No," replied Pietro, "the mischief's done. Have they left?"

"Yes; there they go down stream," answered the former. "That'll end the raid."

"Probably," answered the herdsman. "Larry, I reckon they'll remember to-night for some time to come."

By this time the boys had joined the herdsman in the hallway. They were trembling with excitement and perhaps a little fear, and could not for the life of them regain their self-control for some moments. Jack returned from the kitchen and stood with the others, while Larraby finished the operation of binding Snaky hand and foot.

"How's he doing?" asked Pietro, as Jack's voice sounded in the darkness.

"Oh, all right," answered the lad, faintly. "He's muttering to himself the whole while."

"Is Master Harry with him?"

"Yes; he sent me for the news."

"Tell him they've left, and that he mustn't leave the man. Larry, take a look at Firefly."

As Larraby ascended the stairs, Pietro turned to Walter and said:—

"What's best to be done, now, my lad? It'll be tough work gettin' word to the ranch by day. Hadn't some one better start just before daybreak?"

"By all means," answered Walter, promptly. "Who'd be the best one to go?"

"Either Larraby or you, for Tony couldn't make the time."

"Then I'll go," volunteered the boy; "for you'll

need Larraby to help you in case of an attack. Tony, put me up some lunch, and I'll start as soon as it's dark enough."

"Don't go, Walt," protested the club, "for they'll surely see you, and will make no end of trouble."

"Nonsense!" replied the lad, confidently. "Leveller can beat them all; and, besides, if I get a good start, they won't see me."

"What time will you arrive?" asked Paul.

"About noon, if I ride fast. We'll be back late this evening."

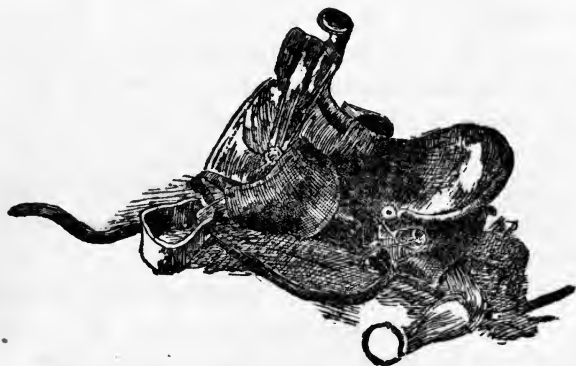
As the lad said this, he raised the window in the rear of the lodge-room, crossed the veranda, and ran to the stable. Almost at the same instant, the greyhounds set up their plaintive greetings, and the setters barked loudly. Walter slid the slatted door back, while Arthur and Jack, who had followed him, assisted with the saddling and bridling.

"Stop your noise, Von!" commanded Walter, as the setter barked and jumped about in his glee. "Don't you know we never shoot birds at night?"

"Here's de lunch, Masser Walter," said Tony, as he hobbled out to the stable. "De best success, sah, de best success to you."

Just then the brightness disappeared altogether, and looking up the boys saw that the moon had become screened behind a great black cloud, and almost at the same moment Walter led Leveller from his

stall. The lunch was placed in the saddle-bag, and Walter threw his foot across the saddle and galloped off into the darkness as his chums called a last farewell in a guarded undertone.



CHAPTER XII

WALTER A CAPTIVE

IT must not be supposed that Walter had set out upon his journey with no fear of the three bandits in his heart. He did not wish to leave his friends with only Pietro and Tony to assist in the protection of the lodge and the guarding of the captured outlaws, and he knew that Larraby would be of great help in case of hostilities, and would inspire confidence among his chums. It was true that Tony knew the trail to the ranch perfectly well, and that he had been a trusted servant for many years; but he was well on in years now, and a gallop of some fifty miles would have been a little too much for the old negro. The lad felt confident that Leveller would make the journey without turning a hair, and that he would be back late that night or early the following morning with a half-dozen rancheros and a deputy sheriff.

The club had retired after an exciting day's sport, very much worn out, only to be disturbed in the midst of their slumbers by the startling news that the outlaws were creeping through the grass towards the

lodge. That was enough to cause the lads to tumble from their bunks with wonderful alacrity, and to assist as best they could in the capture of the highwaymen. As Walter rode on down the prairie towards the trail that led to the ranch, he recalled all the exciting events connected with the attempted raid, and was forced to ask himself three questions: Had the outlaws seen Firefly taken to the lodge? What reasons had they for planning another robbery so soon after the successful hold-up of the express? and What would have happened if Pietro had not detected them before they had reached the camp?

Walter had no means of knowing whether the brigands had seen Firefly led towards the lodge or not, and could not induce himself to believe that they would run such risks for a few provisions and firearms, though the reader knows that such was the case. The last question was not a very pleasant thought, and the lad banished it for more congenial soliloquies.

"They must think we're a lot of mealy-mouthed dudes," he told himself, "and that we'd surrender at the very sound of their names. They did give us quite a scare, though," he went on, his breath unconsciously quickening, "and one we won't get over very soon. Didn't Larraby answer that fellow they call Snaky well, though? He's a perfect brick, & Larry! He should have been a detective!"

Walter ran on in this strain until he had recalled everything of importance that had taken place since their arrival, and was forced to acknowledge that things were altogether too serious to make any sort of sport enjoyable.

"Well, I'll be able to accept almost any sentence now," he continued, "and couldn't blame Uncle John or father. The fellows will be safe enough until I get back, and then we shall talk the thing over. Whatever happens, we can at least look back upon a week of exciting sport."

While Walter was thus occupied, he never for a moment relaxed his vigilance. He had gone nearly five miles when the first gray streaks of dawn began to appear; and soon after a little wind rustled the leaves and waved the prairie grass. This, with Leveller's steady tramp, tramp, tramp, and the chirp of the countless insects in the brush were the only sounds. Not a bird, not a bunch of steers upon the horizon; the very largeness of the view, as day advanced, increased the lad's sense of solitude and loneliness.

"We've had some long rides and good old hunts together, haven't we, old boy?" said Walter, patting the chestnut's glossy neck; "and we're likely to have more, if things come out all right."

And the horse threw up his head as though he understood, quickening his step and shaking his bit playfully.

"Feeling pretty well, aren't you, old fellow?" continued Walter, gathering the reins firmly in his hands; "let me see one of your three-mile gallops before it gets too warm."

Leveller, before he had fairly felt the touch of the spur, broke into a graceful gallop that carried horse and rider over the prairie at an astonishing pace—down through rocky creek bottoms, some dry, some a foot or two deep, avoiding rocky cliffs, past great strings of tall cottonwoods, and around clumps of jack-oaks that were well-nigh impenetrable.

"There!" said Walter, as he reined in the ambitious animal and started for a line of willows that sprung up from a rocky ledge. "I believe you'd like a little grass and water, and I'm sure I'd like to see what Tony has put up for my breakfast."

He rode along the ledge until he came to the head of the spring. It was a picturesque spot, surrounded by rocks and willows, which fairly rang with the songs of robins and brown thrushes. Quails were whistling merrily in an adjoining thicket, and the soft morning air was beginning to dry with the rising of the sun.

Walter dismounted, removing the heavy Mexican saddle and blanket. He then relieved Leveller of the bridle, and threw his lariat about the animal's neck, fastening the other end to a nearby tree. He next took the lunch from the saddle-bag, and spread

it upon a rock by the spring. Tony had put up a couple of hard-boiled eggs, three slices of buttered bread, and a half-dozen sweet pickles. The lad meditated upon them a moment, and then grasped his rifle and started for the thicket in search of a quail.

"This ride and the events of the night have made me hungry as a wolf in winter," he told himself, as he cleared the ledge and walked towards the bushes. "That breakfast isn't worth a biscuit."

"Bob White, Bob White," came regularly and often from the thicket, and the lad paused just long enough to take a shot at a cock. Crack! spoke the Winchester, and over toppled the quail, shot through the head. The others rose to wing with a great buzz instantly, but they did not fly close enough to present a good shot. They alighted a couple of hundred yards further up a gentle slope, in another clump of bushes. Walter picked up the dead quail and started for another. He worked his way along slowly and cautiously, and was finally rewarded by bagging a second bird.

He started back for the spring, well pleased with the prospects for a savory breakfast. He could not see Leveller as he approached and concluded that the horse had lain down for a good roll, or was perhaps enjoying the cool spring water. This proved to be the case, for another moment and the shining back of the chestnut rose to view.

"Perhaps it was foolish to fire my rifle so near camp," he said, when he had arrived within a few feet of the rocks. "I wonder how far I've come; probably ten or twelve miles."

The very next instant Walter started to step upon the rocks, but recoiled before the muzzle of a Winchester that was thrust directly beneath his nose.

"Cabrillo!" he cried, as he felt every drop of blood sink to his feet, and then rush back again to his heart.

"Drop — that — gun!" said the chief, truculently, pausing between each word to display a savage smile and glittering set of teeth.

Walter saw at once that it was useless to resist, and let the rifle fall from his hands.

"Now, kindly remove that belt, and mind you don't put a finger on the pistols — they look so neat in the holsters."

The lad unbuckled the belt at once, and it, too, fell to the ground.

"Stand where you are!" he commanded, dropping his rifle and advancing with a pistol in his right hand, which he pointed straight at the terrified boy. "Place your hands behind. Hurry!" he said, raising the pistol as if to strike the lad a crushing blow. "That's right, now keep them there."

With his left hand, the outlaw freed the lariat from about his waist, and in a twinkling had confined

Walter's arms securely. He kept his pistol in his right hand all the time, and it was marvellous how dexterously he handled the thong.

"That's better!" he exclaimed, as he finished by winding the lariat a couple of times about the lad's waist. "Now we'll have some breakfast, for I'm a bit hungry myself."

Walter followed him to the spring, where he viewed the bread, eggs, and pickles with eyes of scarcely veiled contempt.

"Were you not to have something warm?" he asked, his lips curling.

"I have shot a couple of birds, if that's what you mean," replied Walter, who had by this time somewhat recovered from his terrible fright.

"And so I thought. Where are they?"

"In my pockets," answered the former, seating himself upon a rock.

"Of course. How stupid of me. I suppose you cannot conveniently hand them to me, so I shall be obliged to relieve you myself."

As he spoke, he thrust the pistol, with which he had been toying, back into his belt.

"Ah," said he, as he drew the quails from the lad's pocket; "shot through the heads—very clever indeed. We're all clever—some in one way, and some in another."

Walter made no reply to this speech. His face

looked all the anger and fear he felt, and words would have been useless. He watched the outlaw as he skilfully picked and cleaned the birds, after which the man scraped a bunch of twigs and dried leaves in a heap, and lighted them.

While he was thus employed, Walter was busy thinking of a dozen things: What would the fellows say, if the party from the ranch failed to arrive by midnight or the following morning at the latest? And what did the outlaw intend to do with him? —together with many not very feasible schemes of escape. His meditations were interrupted by the outlaw's voice.

"How comes it you're off on a ten-mile ride so early in the morning?" he asked, as he turned the quails upon the coals. "Out for the air?"

"I was out for a little gallop," answered our hero, endeavoring to emulate the outlaw's friendly tone.

"That's good — a fine morning. Do you often ride ten miles before breakfast?"

"Frequently," was the reply.

"In the direction of your uncle's ranch?"

"Sometimes."

"Do you think that bird is sufficiently cooked?" asked Cabrillo, with an accent so curious that the lad could not for the life of him tell whether he was being laughed at or whether the brigand was asking information. He preferred to think the latter.

"It looks so," answered the boy.

"I think so too," continued the other, cocking his head on one side with the air of a connoisseur. "It isn't often I get such grub."

"I don't doubt it," replied Walter, with disgust. "Your meals are necessarily few and far between."

"Quite so. That remark, however, will cost you your breakfast."

"Breakfast or no breakfast, I should like to know a few things myself, if you are through with questioning me," said the boy, growing a bit bolder.

"Fire away," replied the chief, eating heartily.

"Well, I should like to know why you have held me up, and what you are going to do with me," began Walter, his voice choking with anger. "I've done nothing to you, and, what's more, I won't go a step with you."

"Ah, but I think you will," answered the chief, tapping his pistols meaningly. "I'll need you for a few days. Leastways, I think so."

"What do you mean?"

"You know what I mean, just as well as I do," he cried in reply. "You were on your way to get help to move my lads to the lockup, the three you've ketched because they'd been taking a glass of grog, and perhaps another to wash it down. Don't try to deny it. They do a rattlin' piece of work one night, and another night they act like a lot of lay-figures."

You'd never have been on the peep last night, if it hadn't been for that red-headed idiot Firefly. I don't know how you ketched him, but I do know he's the fishiest thing that ever breathed. Now, let me tell you lads one thing: You've come down here with your fancy guns and fishin' tackle, and long-legged hounds, and not only shoot our game, but go to runnin' a sandy on my men. By gum! You're the first lot that ever came amongst us, and you'll be the last. The Indians, theirselves, don't come trailin' through here any more,—they know better; and we'll have no more of it from a lot of school-boys."

"Is that all?" asked the lad.

"Well, it's all you're to hear," returned the man with a deep growl, as he tackled the second quail.

"I'm glad that it is," continued Walter, settling to a more comfortable position. "I know about what to expect at the hands of such a villain as you, and I shall not be surprised if I am ill-treated and starved for a few days. But after that, let me say that there will be trouble for you, and trouble of the worst kind. My uncle and father have offered you every inducement to change the course of your wicked lives, and you have flatly refused time and again. When they hear that I started for the ranch this morning, as they will hear in a couple of days, and have not been heard from, they will know exactly where to look for

me. And the hills will swarm with blue-coated soldiers and detectives in all sorts of suits and make-ups."

"Let them come," cried the chief, derisively. "They've tried that often enough. The Grouse hills has a bad sound to them that knows."

"Perhaps they have had," answered Walter, struggling to free his arms. "But all things have an end, and these clever people sometimes come up with a short turn."

"As you did after shootin' quails like you was at a clay-pigeon match," continued the other with a grin, holding a slice of bread and pickle in one hand and a bird in the other. "Delicious is the very word."

"I'm glad you think so; I must take your word for it."

"Indeed you must, my unoffending, little 'tender-foot.' When did you dine last?"

"Last night at supper."

"Really? I had an idea you had hot birds and cold bottles after that very clever performance last night. How did you manage it so quiet-like? I was studyin' on it this mornin'."

"You'll never know, Cabrillo. You have lots to learn."

"Have I? I'm glad to hear it. The papers say I'm very clever and very bad."

"Certainly the latter. Now, if you expect to keep

me from my friends very long, you'll find that another of your plans won't work. We know that your camp is not a great way from ours, and where to go to find it; let me tell you that."

"You do?" asked the outlaw, eyeing the lad curiously. And then, evidently thinking he had shown too much interest in the question, laughed tauntingly in the boy's face.

"I guess not," he continued, rising to his feet and wiping his great knife in the palm of his hand. "You can't fool me, lad, and the sooner you find it out, the better it'll be for you. Mark those words. Ah! it's a wild lot of birds I've had the handlin' of, and more's the wonder they haven't more of 'em felt the cold coil of rope about their necks, or the handcuffs a-jangling on their wrists. I know how they look, with their black faces, and wicked, twinkling eyes, as they march them from the cars for a snack of grub, for I've seen 'em do it, though I've never felt the cuffs a-jangling on *my* wrists. It was at Border City some five years ago, and I stood along with the crowd on the platform. 'Is that Jim Perkins?' asked a fellow on my left, and another one answers, 'That! sure, that's Perkins, the outlaw, on his way to the halter; he's had a long, free swing, but now he'll swing high and dry, and won't have the whole territory to dance on.' And I can hear the others laugh as they heard the words. And am

I goin' to risk my neck for a bunch of striplin's that come down here with their razor-hounds and cloth dug-outs that you fold up and put in a box? No, not I, and you can bank on that. By-gones is by-gones, and I've run too far on the other road to ever turn back."

Cabrillo paused, and Walter could see that the man's words had left him in no very good humor, for he scowled fiercely, and tightened Leveller's saddle-girth with a final twitch that made the graceful chestnut turn his head in astonishment. He then bridled the horse as quickly, and wound Walter's lasso about his own waist. After he had caught his own horse, which had been running at large, he came up to the lad, his pistol in his right hand, and said with a growl:—

"Now, boy, let's have no nonsense, or I'll hit you a rap with the butt end of this gun."

Walter looked at the man, and saw he meant every word he said, and decided that it would be the poorest kind of policy to offer any resistance just then. He therefore placed his foot into the stirrup which Cabrillo held for him to ascend by, and, with a little assistance on the part of the robber, was soon in the saddle. The lariat pinned his arms so tightly to his sides that the lad was not a little surprised when Cabrillo tied his right leg with a leather thong where it dangled just below the horse's flanks, and then

passed the cord beneath the animal's body, and tied it securely to his left foot, just tight enough to be uncomfortable.

"That's right, Mr. José Cabrillo. You'd better be very careful, for I might get my arms free, and then you'd see no more of me."

"Ah, is that so!" replied the outlaw, mounting, and lighting one of his yellow-covered cigarettes. "How would you manage it?"

"With a touch of my spur, I could show you a gallop that would astonish you."

"You did this morning. I thought I never would come up with you."

"Then you were following me all the while?"

"For some time," said the bandit with a grin. "Did you think we had left the country?"

"We hoped you had; but no such good luck could happen."

"And you'll have worse luck before you're through with us. You'll regret the day you ever came amongst us with your flat saddles and silver spurs."

"Perhaps I have regretted it already," said Walter, to whom the silence was more oppressive than idle conversation. "We have to thank you for spoiling a summer's sport."

"Well, you haven't had a taste of what is to come. We'll teach you to cross our trails like so many jack-rabbits," responded the man, scowling fiercely. "I

shouldn't think your uncle would have trusted you down here with one puncher and a nigger cook. That's what bothers me."

"My uncle is no more afraid of you than we are; and that is very little," said Walter, coolly.

"None of your impudence now, or you'll go without your fried steer for dinner," growled the chief-tain.

This threat had its effect upon our hero, who was naturally beginning to feel very hungry. The thought of fried steer was not at all repulsive, and even inviting to the hungry lad.

"You keep a ranch in connection with your other business?" Walter asked at length, when he had grown tired of watching the outlaw in silence.

"No, we don't have to go to that trouble, I'm glad to say," replied the man, with a grim smile.

"I understood you did not. How far is your cave?"

"What makes you suppose we live in a cave?"

"I have always believed that outlaws spent most of their time in a cave."

"Well, in this you are wrong. I am glad to say that we breathe the fresh air with the rest of the world."

"How soon shall we be there?"

"In the course of an hour. Do you think you can stand a gallop as you are?"

"I could try."

"Then we'll give you a chance."

As the robber said this, he came to a halt, and dismounting, tied his sash tightly about the boy's eyes.

"There! that will do," he said. "What can you see?"

"Pitch darkness," was the reply.

"Very good; now, mind your seat."

Walter heard him remount, and the next moment they were off at what the lad considered a break-neck speed. Down gullies, up steep banks, and through thickets that scratched the lad's lower face and neck badly. If the outlaw noticed the streaks of blood that Walter felt trickling down his neck, he did not mention it or check his speed in the least, and the lad was too plucky to remonstrate.

"It wouldn't be of any use, and I won't give him the satisfaction of knowing that I mind it." As Walter finished the soliloquy, he felt Leveller's head turned to the left, and the next moment he was spinning around like a top — first one way, then the other. The animal did not relish this treatment any more than his master, and began to rear on his hind legs.

"You've lost your bearings, I reckon," said Cabrillo, as the horses once more came to a stand.

"Completely," answered the lad, who felt dizzy from it all.

In another second Walter felt Leveller cautiously pick his way down a steep cliff, and then heard the splashing that told him they had come to a ford. "But it must be a wide ford," thought the lad, as the horses continued to splash through water for some minutes. "It must be the Arkansas."

Walter was far from right in this, and would have been very much surprised had he known that, during the long ride in which he had been blindfolded, the brigand chief had been approaching Deer Lodge, instead of riding from it, and that the lodge itself was not four miles distant.

The lad earnestly hoped that Cabrillo's camp would soon be reached, for he was very tired, sore, and hungry, and he felt that he would be allowed at least a little liberty at the journey's end. He had not long to wait, fortunately, for Cabrillo dismounted and fastened Walter's bridle-rein to the horn of his saddle, and the lad's lariat to the limbs that screened the first entrance to the outlaws' retreat. Walter felt and heard the chestnut follow the bay, and the next moment became aware, from the continued splashing of the water, that, although the horse had left the bed of the main stream, they were still standing in some depth of water. After Cabrillo had arranged each disturbed branch in a faultless position, he unfastened Leveller's bridle-rein from the horn of his own saddle, and spoke to the bay, which clattered up the brook-

let. He then grasped the chestnut's bridle firmly in his right hand, and started to follow the bay. Up, up, up, Walter felt himself carried, until he thought he must be a couple of hundred feet above the stream. He felt that they had entered some very heavily wooded grove, for it was deliciously cool after the long ride in the hot sun, and the songs of the robins and the musical flow of the spring were pleasant greetings to the prisoner.

Whenever Leveller would pause and rear slightly at the strange surroundings and bridle-path, Cabrillo would grasp the lad about his ankle and plunge the spur into the animal's flank. Walter was powerless to resist, but felt the blood rising within him, and he gave an unconscious tug at his bindings.

All at once, when the top of the cliff was reached, Cabrillo whistled twice, for all the world like the call of a quail, and the iron bar grated in its iron rings as it was drawn back. The bay gave a whinny as he trotted to the corral, while the chief led Leveller up the short incline. Walter instinctively felt that they had reached the end of the journey, and hoped he would be given a chance to stretch his limbs. This proved to be the case, for Osborn, after bolting the door, assisted the chief in releasing the prisoner.

Walter was lifted from his horse, and the sash, to his intense relief, was removed from his eyes.

"Have a look about you, lad," said the chief, "and

see how you like the looks of *our* camp. Not so dainty as a fancy log-house with a wide shelter, I can hear you say, but still very fair—those will be your very words.”

Walter did not hear the most of this speech, for everything looked bizarre and yellow as the cloth was taken from his eyes. Gradually, however, things began to assume a more natural tone, and he improved the chance to look about him as he stretched his arms akimbo. His eyes fell upon Jim almost at once, and, much to the outlaw's surprise, he addressed him.

“So you've come back to your old business, have you?” said the lad.

“By gum!” exclaimed the one-eyed man, wriggling like an eel in his surprise and embarrassment. “How in thunder did you know that I gave the cap'n the go-by?”

“Never mind,” answered Walter, enjoying the fellow's discomfort. “But I say,” he continued a moment later, “you have a very pleasant spot here, Cabrillo. May I sample your water?”

“With pleasure. Jim, bring the lad some beef; I faked his birds this mornin'.”

Walter went to the spring, and, kneeling down, drank and bathed his face. The red scar left where the sash had been wound about his face had not yet disappeared, and it was all he could do for some time to control the motion of his hands.

Jim placed a wooden platter of cold broiled beef upon a rock close by, and, though both salt and pepper were missing, the lad ate long and heartily; and, as he afterwards said, it was far more enjoyable than one of Chap's spreads at the academy.

Before Walter had finished his last slice of beef, the same emulation of a quail's cry was heard from without, and the chief opened the heavy oak door and admitted the villanous-looking Tarcedo.

"Well, you ketched the youngster, did you, cap'n?" he said, throwing his rifle and sombrero upon the grass. "I reckon he's a bit surprised. Hey, boy?"

"No more than you will be before you're two days older," replied Walter, with a curl of his lip, as he rose to his feet and walked slowly off.

"Now, wouldn't that kill you?" said Dody, stroking his great black beard and smiling grimly after the retreating form. "Anybody'd think he was sitting behind a royal flush."

"Oh, he's fly, he is," said Cabrillo, rather pleased than otherwise at the lad's independence of manner.

"You're not goin' to give him all this rope, cap'n?"

"Not much. He's stretchin' his limbs after the ride. Got any news?"

"No; on'y those kids are sittin' around under the trees, and lookin' from the door with a spy-glass."

While Tarcedo tackled a great platter of beef, Walter walked about the camp, followed closely by Jim Osborn, who held a revolver in his hand.

"I see you're watching me, but I'll spare you any trouble on that score; I'm not fool enough to try to escape from three men, all good shots with a rifle," said the lad, endeavoring to draw the man into a conversation.

"You'd better not, for the cap'n shoots turtle-doves on the wing with a target rifle," said Jim, following Walter out to the corral, where the lad fed and watered his horse.

"You've got some fine horses here, haven't you?" asked Walter, as his eye took in the fine limbs and flaring nostrils of the animals. "How do you get corn for them?"

The outlaw looked at the lad curiously for a moment, and then drew quietly at his pipe.

"Did you think we raised it?" he asked finally.

"I didn't know," the lad answered, trying in vain to get a view of the surrounding country over the barricade.

"Well, we don't, and you can lay to it," said the other.

"And the horses?" asked Walter. "They're splendid animals."

"Yes, toler'ble fair," agreed Jim, becoming quite friendly as he saw that Walter made no effort to

escape. "That was my black that the cap'n sold one of your friends."

"Indeed!" said the lad in surprise. "He's an excellent horse, and cheap at a hundred."

"That's what I told the cap'n; but he said that was all the lad could lay his hand on, and so let the nag go for that."

"Was he the swiftest horse you had?"

"Not much, though he's a great galloper all the same. The cap'n's bay there is the best in the bunch now, and *he* can't hold a candle to Holton's old mount."

"Where is Holton's horse now?"

"Oh, she's back in Kentuck' a-sportin' silk these two years past, and they say she's a daisy over the grass. Gloaming, they call her."

"I remember reading about her. So Holton used to ride Gloaming, did he? What made him sell her?"

"He didn't sell," the robber answered with a grin. "They ran her off the night I lost this headlight, and that was the last we heard of her till spring."

Walter walked back, his mind filled with wild schemes of escape, none of which seemed worthy of a trial. The door of the retreat was open, and the lad walked in. Cabrillo was conversing earnestly with Tarcedo, and the men lowered their voices as

the prisoner entered. Walter glanced at the table and saw that they had been writing, and then turned his attention to an examination of the interior of the retreat. It was rather more comfortable and far more cleanly than he had expected to find it, which not a little surprised him.

"Cabrillo's seen better days than these," he told himself, as he glanced furtively at the chief, who, with his hat off, presented anything but a bad picture. "If it weren't for that wild light that sometimes comes into his eyes, I should call him a very good-looking chap."

The odd characters burned into the wall amused him greatly, and the presence of the slashed mail-bag emphasized the fact that they were real live outlaws and train-robbers.

The afternoon wore slowly away, and towards sunset another huge plate of beef was brought from the house and placed upon the log. The men paid little attention to the lad, though Walter noticed that they left no firearms about, and gave him no knife with his meat.

As the sun set, the prairie breeze began rustling and tumbling in the woods, and the air began to cool. Walter was sure that the outlaws would make some sort of move by this time, and was therefore not surprised when Tarcedo saddled Cabrillo's horse, took his Winchester, and rode out of the gateway.

Anxious as the lad was over the events of the day, he nevertheless was glad to be bound hand and foot and tumbled into a berth, little guessing what surprises the morrow would bring.



CHAPTER XIII

HARRY ON THE TRAIL



AS Tarcedo had reported to the chief of the desperadoes, the members of the Greyhound Club had spent the greater part of the day in resting beneath the trees, and in keeping a sharp lookout for any signs of Cabrillo. They were not sorry, when they came to search Redwood and Snaky, that

none of the stolen money was found; for, if these two outlaws had had their shares with them, the boys told themselves, Deer Lodge would have been in danger of an attack at any moment. They discussed the outlaws continually, always ending by congratulating Pietro upon his clever reasoning, and saying that they had him to thank for everything,

which was quite true. Pietro was very modest, and only replied good naturedly to all these praises.

"But we didn't get the flower of the flock," he replied on several different occasions, as the lads gathered at the stable door and watched the flying currycomb and brush. "If we had taken Wild Face, the others would have been a hundred miles from here by this time. He's the backbone of the whole troop, and they'd soon split up without him; but he's a bit too foxy for anything of the sort, and I'm afraid he'll make trouble yet."

"You don't think Master Walter will meet him?" asked Paul, who wished a thousand times a day that he had never seen an outlaw.

"I'm not sure," replied the herdsman. "You can't tell anything about it. We'll have to wait until to-night or to-morrow noon at the latest. They'll send men enough to stand any sort of an attack by three men. If the punchers are on the ranges, it may take a few extra hours to round 'em up."

"What would happen if Master Walter did fall in with Cabrillo?" asked Harry, who now wished that he had accompanied Walter to the ranch. "Of course they would not harm him, and he would be perfectly safe while in their hands as a prisoner. Don't you think so, Larry?"

"Yes; and then there would be a bit of trading. Master Walter would stand for the three rascals up-

stairs, and we'd lose the colonel's everlastin' respect for lettin' 'em go."

"Well, it would have been the same if they had ketched you, Larry," argued Pietro. "It would have made no difference in the trade, and we couldn't all leave camp at a jump. I believe Master Walter is well along by this time, and'll fetch up at the ranch by noon."

Walter was well along at that very moment, and going at a break-neck speed over hills, through gullies, and down steep banks, bound hand and foot, and wondering to himself how much breakfast his friends would have eaten if they could have seen him just then — probably about as much as he had had a chance to eat, he told himself.

The day proved to be long and monotonous. Pietro wished to run no risks, he said, and so the lads were stationed, two at a time, to watch the captured outlaws. This proved a break in the dreary monotony of waiting for night, and, as the sensation of guarding noted desperadoes with a loaded Winchester was decidedly new, the lads rather enjoyed it for a time. The men themselves, however, seemed to think the presence of our heroes decidedly objectionable, and did not hesitate to tell them so in no very pleasing tones. Firefly, of course, came in for the butt of their anger, and it is a wonder that the red-headed man did not break the cords that bound

him, so great was his wrath under the continued abuse.

Eugene and Harry stood the first watch, and were relieved after two hours by Arthur and Jack, Paul being employed as lookout from the lodge-room windows and doors with the telescope. The whining and barking of the greyhounds and setters did not add to the lads' enjoyment of the strange situation, and it is safe to say that for the first time since their arrival at the lodge time dragged very slowly.

"If they learn at home what has been going on down here, I'm sure that our deer coursing will be knocked higher than a kite," said Harry to Eugene, as they stretched themselves upon the bank beneath the oaks. "The dogs and horses are just beginning to feel like galloping, and it is a shame to keep them shut up on a day like this."

"Those are my sentiments exactly," replied Eugene; "but all things have an end, and I believe everything will come out right side up, with care. You'll find that Mr. Hillman will be delighted at the capture of these three men, and won't even mention a return to the ranch, or I'll miss my guess. He's been a boy himself, and likes a good horse and dog as well as any one. He saw you were a brick, Harry, and so sent you those pistols we all admire so much."

"They are handsome," said Harry, removing his belt and unbuckling the holsters. "I never saw

such carving on modern pistols before. They're almost too fancy to be of any use," continued the lad, polishing the pearl handles and silver mountings with a bit of chamois.

"Have you tried them?" asked the former.

"A few times. I've cracked at squirrels off and on, and at that wounded coyote last night, when I heard him in the brush. Let's have a little target practice."

Accordingly, the lads put up a mark some fifty feet distant, and began firing with a rapidity that brought loud calls for help from the second story, where the bandits lay stretched in their bunks.

"Cap'n! cap'n!" they shouted wildly, "give 'em a broadsider, and let's get out of this!"

"It's no use, gentlemen," replied the facetious Jack, with a broad grin, as he went to the window and saw what was going on. "My friends are having a little target practice just below. Does the noise disturb you?"

The growls that followed this remark made Arthur, who was seated by the window reading a book, feel as if he were in a menagerie, and a magnificent tiger had just made a gallant though unsuccessful effort to escape. We have all been in just such positions, no doubt, and we have all told ourselves, as the slight bars bend and ring under the gigantic effort, that "we are *so* glad he is caged." Arthur was a boy

clear through, for he forgot his book instantly, and grasped his rifle, which lay across his knees.

"Any more funny attempts, Jack, and the leather lariats wouldn't hold," he said, as the thongs sounded under the futile efforts of the bandits.

Fortunately, the watch was soon after relieved, and the boys descended to assist Larry and Pietro in stretching the silver-tip's skin. Guns were then cleaned, and another batch of letters written to many envious friends in the East. The boys gave a full account of the encounter with the brigands, and, as the papers were full of the train robbery at the time, it is no wonder that the members of the club were indeed heroes when they returned to the academy in the fall.

"I tell Sam Fuller that we have three under our roof, and that not a shot has been fired. Won't that make the Shelter Island crowd stare!" exclaimed Harry, sealing an envelope. "I believe the fellows will take the next train for the West. We couldn't take them in unless we should change our by-laws."

"Don't worry about that," said Arthur, confidently. "They may have reason to congratulate themselves upon not being members of the club, and upon never having forded the Arkansas. The region of the Grouse hills does not bear a very good reputation, as you know."

"Good for game, at any rate," said Paul. "Have

you fellows seen the wildcat since it was mounted? We have placed it on the mantel under the buck's head, and facing the hall. You fellows should notice these little additions."

"Not so very little, either," continued Harry, rolling up his sleeve and displaying the marks left by the knifelike claws. "That was a little ahead of the bear hunt."

"Walt doesn't think so, at any rate," added Eugene. "Larry'll watch the prisoners while we're at supper. Let's go in, for I hear Tony calling."

The lads gathered paper, ink, guns, and pistols from the grass where they had been sitting, and entered the lodge, followed by the entire string of neglected dogs, which had grown in the habit of watching for dainty bits of chicken and stray crackers from their respective masters.

"Tony's feeding the dogs on air, I guess," said Jack, sharing a slice of corn-bread with his favorite, much to the astonishment of his chums. "I guess *he* thinks we're going to have a hunt after a while."

"And so do the rest of us," replied Paul. "Here he comes. Now, ask him yourself."

"Tony," began Jack, as the genial old negro hobbled into the room with a plate of steaming corn-bread, "what are you doing to these hounds that makes them appear so thoroughly impoverished?"

"How's dat, sah?" replied Tony, quickly, grin-

ning and showing the whites of his eyes. "How's dat, sah?"

As he repeated the question, he removed his white cap and stood scratching his head with an expression that brought peals of laughter from the club. Then, as Jack touched each bone of Boomerang's body slowly with his forefinger, the meaning of the words gradually began to dawn upon him and he replaced his cap.

"Dar's whar a heap ob dese people makes a great mistake. Dey go on feedin' and feedin' until you can't tell de hounds from rabbits off clover, and den dey specks de hounds to pick Mars' Jack up at de secon' turn in de medder. How, by gum, I know? 'Cause I had 'em prove it, sah, like dis," said Tony, marking upon the fingers of his left hand each part of the story. "We 'uns had a pack dat was allus nummer one 'bout Dinksville till 'long comes a nigger wid a big yaller hound dat runs 'way from de 'tire pack at Dinksville like dey was hitched to a tree. Now, w'at you tink dat nigger done? He puts on a pink shirt an' glass diamon' an' owns de hull town for more'n a week."

"What did the other members of the Dinksville Coursing Club do then?" asked Eugene, tipping back in his chair.

"Shooks! Dey sat roun' an' tore dere curly locks, while I goes north ob town and borrsers a white hound

dat looks for all de world like Mars' Harry's. I takes him to Dinksville an' tries him wid de Dinksville hounds, but he wasn't in de hunt. I takes him north ob town dat evenin', and says de hound ain't no 'count, nohow, to de boss. He picks up a little block ob wood like he was mad, and cuts' it all up in little shavin's. 'Now, Mars' Irvin',' says he like dat, 'ef you tink dat hound can't run 'way an' hide from dat yaller pup, you's mistaken. You go an' tie dat hound in your potato cellar, an' give him one corn biscuit a day for three days, an' drink ebery meal. After dat, if he can't beat dat yaller hound, den you're welcome to de contents ob my corn crib.' I takes him home an' Lisa says: 'Goodness grashus, w'at you gwinter do?' an' I tells Lisa w'at the man done tole me. W'en de three days come roun', we all goes to de medder an' starts a 'jack.' Well, gem'men, dat yaller hound looks like he was runnin' de other way, an' Jess Blossom had to strike his colors, sah. W'en we got up to de white hound, he'd eaten de 'jack' clean up, and was fixin' to go to sleep. Dat's why the hounds ought to 'pear so 'poverished like, as you say, Mars' Jack."

"But we're not going to get any chance to hunt," protested Jack, with a feigned earnestness. "I believe Master Walter's uncle will request us to pack for the ranch when he returns."

"Laws, honey, w'en you says dat, you don't know

Mars' Hillman like dis here nigger — 'deed you don't. Mars' Walter will 'pear 'fore sunrise, Mars' Jack, mark w'at I tell you now."

The boys were of the same opinion too, and finished a hearty supper in very good spirits. The remainder of the day was spent in guarding the prisoners and in making arrangements for the night.

"You're all in favor of standing watches to-night?" said Pietro, as the boys came out to see him feed and put fresh bedding in the horses' stalls. "Who's with those rascals now?"

"Master Paul and Larry," replied Harry.

"Then you and Master Eugene had better relieve them at eight o'clock. It is now half-past seven."

"Who'll go on at ten?" asked Jack.

"Not at ten, but at twelve," replied Pietro. "I think four-hour watches better at night. I'll do a turn with Master Jack and Master Arthur from twelve to four, and we can finish the night by lettin' the other four take us to daylight."

"What will Tony be doing all that while?" asked Eugene, as the cook came up to borrow a pipeful of tobacco from the hostler.

"Tony is entitled to a week's rest after that beautiful fabrication at the supper table," said Jack with a deep sigh.

"I specs dat's so, Mars' Jack," replied the cook,

with a broad grin. "I learnt to make 'em at Dinks-ville, Mars' Jack, an' I tell you dey tastes good."

"Ha, ha!" laughed the club. "Master Jack wasn't speaking of the flapjacks, Tony, but of your story. He wishes to know more about it."

"Dat's all I knows, sah, sure enough. But Mars' Jack, he likes his little joke, does Mars' Jack." And with this the old negro hobbled off to the kitchen to attend to his dishes. The shadows soon after began to clothe everything in pitch darkness; and before Harry and Eugene ascended the stairs to relieve Paul and the cowboy, Pietro called the lads together.

"It's going to be a black night," said he, "and we'd better leave one in the room durin' the watches, while the others ought to watch the grass from the windows. I wouldn't go too near the light, 'cause they might get the drop on you. We'll have to move foxy-like to-night. Do you understand?"

"Perfectly," answered the club in chorus. "What time are we to expect Master Walter?"

"About midnight at the earliest, but it ain't likely he'll be here afore sunrise," replied the herdsman, as he ascended the stairs to take a last look at the captured outlaws.

Paul and Larry were then relieved by Eugene and Harry, while the others, after trying in vain to amuse themselves with their banjos and guitars, tumbled into their bunks, and were soon after snoring loudly.

"My!" exclaimed Eugene, as he stopped at the door to have a word with Harry. "I never saw such a dark, quiet night. It makes me afraid to breathe hard. I believe something's going to happen."

"Nonsense," returned the other. "Go and make the rounds of the house, and come back here in a couple of hours. I'll take that end of it then. But keep your eyes wide open, for you don't know what'll turn up."

Thus encouraged, Eugene shouldered his Winchester and descended the stairs, where he kept a careful watch for a couple of hours. The greyhounds and setters were great company for the lad at first, and the time did not drag as slowly as one would suppose.

"I'm glad Pietro let the dogs out," he said to himself, "for they don't all sleep at once, and would be likely to hear anything unusual, and make a fuss. Pietro seems to think we won't hear from them before midnight, if at all. I'll be glad when those confounded rascals are run down, and we can have a hunt with no disturbances. Hey, boy?" As he said this, he bent over and patted his favorite, which wagged its tail in response.

Although one or more of the dogs was always moving about, Eugene nevertheless was not sorry when the two hours had arrived, and he changed places with Harry.

"It's pretty lonely in the shadow of that veranda,

Harry," said Eugene, as he joined his chum. "I'd get a fencing foil and keep those dogs on their legs, if I were you."

Harry was, with the possible exception of Walter, by far the most daring of the members of the club, and much preferred the black night to anything else. The darkness had never hurt him, and had always oddly fascinated him. He had taken many long, fast rides at night, both on horseback and afloat, and had never come to grief in any way. "It's much more enjoyable and exciting to go ploughing through the waves and storm under a double reef, in pitch darkness, not knowing or caring where you are, than to sail with your gunwales high and dry, with a brass compass and land on either hand," he used to say to his many friends, when the subject of sports was the all-absorbing topic of conversation, as it was a great deal at Andover.

"I don't understand why Eugene feels as he does about these rogues," he soliloquized, as he descended the stairs with a decided feeling of anticipation. "I'd much rather be here enjoying the breeze than up in that stuffy room with those men. It seems to me that we've got the upper hand on Cabrillo's crowd, and that there's little to worry about. I don't believe they'll run any risks for these fellows."

Harry speculated a while longer upon the probable outcome of the club's experiences with the band, and

then began and walked in the shadow of the veranda around the lodge. As Pietro had said, the night proved to be dark and cloudy, and the grove of oaks looked but slightly blacker than the intervening grassland. The wind moaned, sighed, and tumbled irregularly in the woods, and nearly drowned the chirping of the crickets. Harry began to grow impatient, and longed for a chance to try his pistols or the ever-ready rifle. He had wondered many times that day why he had not taken a flying shot at Cabrillo and his men as they darted for the bank after they heard Snaky's cry. He inwardly acknowledged that he was badly frightened at the time, but was certain it was because he had heard his chums' knees knocking violently together.

"If I get any more such chances, I'm liable to take them," he said, as he marched slowly about. "They'd do that very thing to me if —"

Harry had just turned the corner of the lodge, and was about to end his soliloquy, when he was thoroughly startled by catching sight of a dark figure gliding swiftly from the stable door. Nine boys out of ten would have fired their pistols in the air, and would have set up a yell that would have done credit to one of Buffalo Bill's Indians, and this is what our hero should have done. Instead of this, however, he dropped upon his hands and knees and peered through the railing towards the retreating form. Much to the

lad's surprise, the man cleared the bank at a bound, and Harry thought he heard him crashing through the bushes. He listened intently, and was sure he heard him, a few moments later, splash into the stream. Von and Tan must have heard him too, for they growled savagely, and the greyhounds followed their example.

"Hush!" commanded the lad, as the dogs began stirring about. "Lie down! go to sleep!"

The dogs did not seem at all inclined to obey, and Harry was forced to coax them into the kitchen and throw out a plate of corn-bread before they quieted down. Then he returned to the east end of the veranda and listened again.

"If that fellow splashed into the stream, he's got a horse there. That's so!" exclaimed the excited boy, as a bright thought struck him, "and it's my horse!"

The thought of having Prince Royal stolen from under his very nose caused him to forget all caution and fear and rush to the railing. Dropping his rifle, he vaulted silently to the ground and ran out to the stable. He placed his hand upon the slatted door and started to push it back. As he did so, he grasped a bit of paper in his right hand, and was surprised to find it was held in position with a pin. The lad opened the door at once, and walked quickly to his favorite's stall. Striking a match, he held it

low, and saw, to his inexpressible joy, that the black was safe and sound. He therefore unfolded the paper without delay, and knelt in the corner of the stall as he read the following:—

“The young gentleman riding the chestnut horse is in the hands of José Cabrillo, and wishes to tell his many friends at this shooting camp that he is heartily sick of living on broiled steer and water, and would like to be released. The said José Cabrillo knows a thing or two himself, and says he will let the lad go when three of his men return to his camp in the mountains. If the men are not back by noon, the lad swings high and dry from a cottonwood.”

That was all the strange communication said, but it was quite enough to cause the terrified boy to change color half a dozen times in as many seconds.

“Walter a captive!” he exclaimed, as he turned the sheet over in the hope of seeing something on the other side. He caught sight of an odd design, but his match went out, and he was obliged to strike another. He regretted extremely a moment later that he did so, for the design was nothing more nor less than a skull and cross-bones, which shone clear and distinct against the heavy white linen.

“That was written by Wild Face himself,” he said, noting the spelling and punctuation of the note, together with the skull and cross-bones. “That’s

pretty good linen for such a message, and a pretty good sketch, too. Now, what shall I do? There's nothing to fear until noon, and even then I don't believe there'll be any high-and-dry swinging from lofty cottonwoods. The fact is, those fellows' knees have begun to weaken since we captured three of their men, and they don't quite know how to take us. It's too bad about Walt. I wonder how it happened. I don't believe he ever said anything of the kind, and will expect assistance in a day or two. I'd give most anything to know where that fellow is."

Harry walked back to the stable door and closed it. As it shut with a soft rattle, a leather strap dropped to the ground. Picking it up, Harry felt that it was a belt, and that, by the embossed leather, it was Walter's.

"A delicate way of showing that their message bears the truth," said the lad, as he tossed the leather aside. He stood pondering for some moments in silence, then walked rapidly to the camp and entered the lodge-room. He felt rifles, pistols, fishing rods and fencing foils, boxing gloves and sombreros before his hand at last fell upon a lariat. This he wound about his waist and returned to the door.

"It's a shame the fellows keep so much on that table," said he, as he paused a moment to ascertain if Eugene had been disturbed by the low growling

of the dogs, and if his absence at the stable had been noticed. "A fellow never finds what he wants under quarter of an hour."

Harry caught up his rifle as he cleared the railing for the third time, and then ran in a crouching attitude towards the bank. Nothing but the moaning and tumbling of the wind in the trees disturbed the silence, and there was no clew to the whereabouts of the dark figure that had glided so swiftly away but a few moments before.

Although Harry had never forgotten the fact that he had distinctly seen Cabrillo cover up his trail by dismounting in midstream and open a bridle-path by fastening his lariat to a limb, his unsuccessful efforts to determine just where the desperado had left the creek had quite convinced him that he was wrong in supposing that the outlaws' camp was among the cliffs below Deer Lodge. He was certain, however, that their camp was down stream, for four things pointed clearly to the fact: he had met the chief of the brigands below the lodge; Eugene and he had captured Firefly still further below; the outlaws were approaching up stream when they were discovered by Pietro; and the chief had met Jim Osborn not far from where the bear had been shot.

"Cabrillo is noted for covering his trail," the boy told himself; "but I don't believe he and his men would take the trouble to ride in the creek bottoms

if their camp were twenty miles away. I'll just trot down stream along the bank, and see if I can't see something more of that dark figure."

So Harry grasped his Winchester firmly in his right hand and ran swiftly down the bank for three or four hundred yards, until his breath was all spent. Then he slowed up to a quick walk, and started to follow a deer trail that led down to the water's edge. Luck was certainly on his side, for he had not taken a dozen steps in the descent before the moon showed herself for a moment. Brief as was the space of time in which the vale glowed faintly in the pale light, it was nevertheless sufficient to afford our hero an opportunity of catching sight of Tarcedo's dark form as it moved silently along the bank. The man's hands were shoved into his pockets, and he carried a gun in the hollow of his right arm. Harry was on the point of ordering him to halt, but on a second's reflection he wisely decided not to do so, but to follow the outlaw to Cabrillo's camp. The man moved like a cat, and it was easy to see that his woodcraft had come with an experience of many years. He wore heavy boots, but even then did not make as much noise as our hero did with his light Indian moccasins. Whenever the bandit came to a fallen log or heap of dead branches, he would turn aside without the sound of a bough breaking, or the loss of a moment. Harry found it difficult to keep him in

sight, for the stream turned sharply many times, and the bushes in many cases grew shoulder high. At last, however, after the lad had followed him more than a mile, the outlaw halted in a little moonlit glade and whistled softly. Harry was naturally badly frightened, for he expected to see the other two men appear from the bushes at any moment. Fortunately, his fears were of short duration, for a magnificent horse trotted out from under the trees and approached the man with a playful kick of its heels. The lad thought, as the moonlight danced and sparkled on the animal's head, neck, and saddle, that he was even handsomer than Prince Royal, and that his movements were about as graceful. He did not have much time to spend in idle comparisons, however, for the man mounted at once and entered the creek with a splashing of hoofs.

Harry realized at once that the hardest work was now before him, for the horse moved rapidly off down stream. The lad knew that it would be unwise to follow in the creek, for the noise he was sure to make would certainly be heard by the outlaw. He therefore took the only course possible under the circumstances, and followed as best he could through the thickets and undergrowth that fairly covered the bank at this point. The splashing of the outlaw's horse came only faintly to him now, and Harry knew the man was gaining. The lad was very active, and plunged into

the darkness unflinchingly. His Winchester was a great handicap, and he thought seriously of dropping it many times. But the remembrance of his encounter with the wildcat was still fresh in his memory, and he bravely clung to it through all. He felt that his face was bleeding, and that his garments had been badly torn. The darkness beneath the great trees was almost as black as the thickets themselves, and it was difficult to distinguish one from the other. The sound of the retreating horseman gave him courage, and he gallantly struggled on. At last, after a seeming eternity, the sound of splashing ceased, and Harry improved the opportunity to rub his aching limbs. He looked below and saw that he was on the bank of a little stream that sparkled down the quiet vale from the heights above. The sound of the running water reminded him that he was about as thirsty and hot as he had ever been before in his life, and caused him to forget for a moment the object of his scouting. He was forcibly reminded a moment later, however, for a noise in the creek caused him to turn and look quickly to the right. He could see nothing for a few seconds, and then was fairly appalled by seeing a great black mass of foliage move outward as if it were swung on hinges, followed by the appearance of the horse, riderless, in the bed of the brooklet. The limb swung back into position, and the man crept out from beneath the bushes. Harry flung himself flat

upon his face, and waited breathlessly until the sound of the outlaw and his horse had died out altogether. Then he removed his sombrero and fanned his face for some moments in silence.

"What if I had been caught drinking from the spring!" he exclaimed, descending to the water with a stealthy step. "I'd have been a prisoner with Walter by this time, and much good would my trip have come to. I ought to have remembered that little operation I saw Cabrillo go through. Well, 'all's well that ends well,' they say, and I hope it will prove true in this case."

The lad occupied the next quarter hour in bathing his face and hands and in having a good rest. It was astonishing how soundly he reasoned in regard to the outlaws and the probable position of their camp, and how fearlessly he started to ascend to the summit of the precipitous cliff.

"There's no chance of their seeing me on a night like this, and it isn't probable that they have any dogs about the place, for dogs are dangerous tale-bearers," he soliloquized, leaning against a boulder for a little rest and thought. And then he began to feel that it would be very foolhardy to approach any nearer the camp; for he knew about where it was, and could guide Pietro, Larry, and his friends to that very spot. Upon second thought, however, he concluded that it was his obvious duty to draw as close

as possible, under the favorable ambush of the great rocks and black night. He therefore continued the ascent, and soon felt that he was drawing near to the outlaws' camp. Nor was he deceived, for he soon heard the not very distinct tones of human voices, which grew steadily louder as he approached. Harry judged by the sound that they were talking earnestly, and almost angrily, but no intelligible words came to his hearing.

Crawling on all-fours he approached steadily and cautiously towards them, till at last, raising his head to a six-inch aperture among the rocks, which shone just a trifle in the darkness, he could see straight into the outlaws' camp. The sight of the rough-looking men, only duskily flickered over by the blaze, suddenly put the boy in great fear, for he ducked his head, and lay there listening for some minutes, as silent as could be.

He soon raised it upon hearing some one moving about, and saw that it was a great tall fellow heaping wood upon the fire. Harry watched the scene with breathless interest and attention. The man took a great piece of beef from a limb, and, placing it upon a log, cut a score of steaks, after which he returned the beef to the tree. The others watched him idly as he superintended the cooking of the steaks. When this was finished, the three stretched themselves upon their blankets.

The chief began with a perfect storm of oaths, and continued to abuse the men for allowing Firefly to escape, and for making all the trouble. Before he had finished, Jim's face was lifted appealingly to his, and Tarcedo showed by his actions that he felt the sharp rebuke as well as the other man.

"Here," went on Cabrillo, his eyes glistening like white diamonds, but mere specks in his well-modelled head, "we'll have those men along about sundown to-morrer, or *rabbits* won't be the name for us. All's up — you can't turn your lives now, more's the pity; and you'd better cling together. It's to save you and me and all from the blessed halter, and the clink of the handcuffs, that I'm speakin'. I've given you my reasons afore, and sound they are you won't deny. I reckon they'll think well of that little communication, and'll slice the lariats that hold the boys down without any chatter. You can lay to it, we'll be tippin' glasses with the three of 'em to-morrer night."

Harry thought that Cabrillo would have been very much surprised if he could have known that the very communication referred to was in the pocket of a young man who was at that very moment listening to every word the three bandits uttered. "He'd be mad enough to kill me on the spot," said Harry, drawing a sharp breath, as the conversation was resumed by the outlaws.

"Have you any more stuff about, cap'n?" asked

Tarcedo, clearing his throat as if he were suffering from a bad cold on the lungs.

"Not any more about here, and don't you forget it," answered the chief, tauntingly. "But I can put my hand on it for those that deserve it, any time, and you can bank on that."

"I'll yield up a sparkler for a small pint," said Dody, with another hoarse cough.

"That's it, yield up a sparkler for a small pint, will you! And then you wonder why I'm rich and you're often wantin' a brace of pistols to start business with!" cried the chief, passionately. "You haven't got the sense of a wooden Indian."

And then all of a sudden Tarcedo's humble reply was interrupted by a rapid firing that came from the direction of the lodge. The rocks of the cliff echoed it a score of times. The men jumped to their feet instantly, and ran to the barricade. Harry had scarcely time to twitch under the boulder before Cabrillo himself mounted just above him and stood listening for a repetition of the firing. The lad was so frightened by the sudden movement that he hardly allowed himself to breathe. To make matters worse, the moon shone clearly for a brief period, and Harry was certain that he should be discovered if Cabrillo descended on that side; for there was not enough overhang to the boulder to enable the lad to keep entirely in the shadow. Then, too, the thought

that his friends at the lodge were in trouble through his deserting his post, was a crushing blow, and he told himself that he had been guilty of an unpardonable offence. What if Eugene had left the captured outlaws to search for him, and they had freed themselves during his absence, and had turned the tables on the club! All these things passed through his mind in a twinkling, and caused cold perspiration to cover his face.

The firing was repeated a second and third time at intervals of one minute each, and Harry's fears were thereby put at rest; for he recognized them as one of the club signals which had been adopted before leaving the academy, and which was meant as a call for him to return.

"I can't answer it now," he thought, "but I will as soon as possible. I suppose they are greatly upset."

Cabrillo, fortunately, did not descend on the outer side of the barricade, and Harry was left undiscovered. He breathed more freely as the outlaw once more returned to his blanket, and their conversation was resumed.

"I can't tell for the life of me what those kids are firin' at," remarked the chief, puffing quietly at his cigarette as he fell into a brown study. "It'll not be the boys so soon, I reckon. Did you see anything of a watch, Dody?"

"Not I," replied the other, quickly. "I came up behind the stable and wasted no time in carryin' out orders."

"Well, we'd better stand watch ourselves, though," returned José. "Jim, you take the first end, and I'll come on at three."

"Very well, cap'n," returned Osborn.

"Dody, you've earned a straight sleep; you'd better have a look at the lad, and then turn in."

Harry watched the outlaw as he arose from the ground and entered the house.

"So Walt's in there, is he!" exclaimed our hero, as the man disappeared. "I wonder if I can get a chance to speak with him. My! if Pietro and Larry were here, we'd fix those fellows in about three shakes of a lamb's tail."

But no such good luck was to happen, and Harry was obliged to abandon the idea of having a word with the prisoner. Cabrillo did not turn in, but slept right before the lad upon the grass, his belt and rifle close at hand. Jim shouldered his rifle and made an inspection of the horses, after which he returned and took a seat with his back against the retreat. The fire gradually died down and then went out; the wind ceased to tumble in the woods, and barely moved the leaves in the trees above. Once or twice the robber chief would waken with a start and cast a furtive glance at Jim, who would always start up and

make the rounds of the enclosure. Harry was oddly fascinated by the strange scene, and did not realize for some time how exhausted he really was. As soon as Cabrillo's snoring reached Jim's ears, that worthy dropped his head upon his chest and followed suit. Harry thought the time had come to enter the house and release his chum, and was on the point of scaling the barricade when Cabrillo awoke with an oath and sent a broken branch flying towards the guard.

"Keep your single deadlight open, you wooden-head!" he cried fiercely, "or you'll go out of here with another slash in your arm. Mind that!"

The man's tone and manner struck fresh terror to the lad's heart, and he wisely refrained from scaling the wall. As Jim did not seem inclined to return to his seat after the stinging rebuke, Harry closed his heavy eyes and was soon sleeping soundly. He was awakened once during the night by a sound from within; but as soon as he had satisfied himself that it was only the chief changing places with Osborn, he fell back again and did not open his eyes until the shrill neighing of horses coming from the direction of the corral brought him to his senses.

CHAPTER XIV

HANK DOBSON

HARRY awoke with a start. He was greatly surprised upon finding that day was already beginning to break, and that he had rolled from under the rock in plain sight of any one who might chance to mount the barricade. It was clear that he must change his position at once, and so he rose to his knees and peered through the aperture in the rocks. Jim Osborn lay stretched at full length upon the grass, snoring loudly, while Cabrillo was engaged in the operation of rolling a cigarette. It was beginning to grow light very fast, and Harry saw that he had not a moment to lose. He looked along the wall to the right and left, and decided that the best shelter was afforded by a thick growth of evergreens that grew hard by the oak door. To this he crawled rapidly on all-fours. As he did so, he could hear the neighing of horses repeated, and, as he took a quick, bold glance through a crack in the door, he saw Cabrillo receding in the direction of the corral.

"He's going to feed," thought the lad, "and, as that one-eyed fellow is sleeping soundly, I may as

well stay here by the gate. That black-bearded rascal won't wake for another hour. Now, I wonder where they think I am, back at the lodge."

This soliloquy caused our hero to glance quickly down the bed of the spring. The thought of escaped bandits was not very pleasant, and he decided that it was not safe to remain about the entrance to the retreat any longer. A last look through the crack was enough to satisfy the lad that Cabrillo was about to carry out some sort of scheme; for he was seen to advance towards the door, leading his magnificent bay all saddled and bridled. He paused at the spring long enough to allow the animal to drink, and then they crossed the tiny stream, the horse standing at the door of the house while Cabrillo entered.

"That's the same horse that fellow rode last night," said Harry, still keeping his place at the gate; "and he's a perfect beauty, too."

Harry forgot all about the horse the next instant; for the chief appeared at the door with the blindfolded Walter in his arms, placing him upon the horse as he had done the day before, and confining his legs about the animal's flanks in the same manner. Walter was about as much surprised as Harry, especially as the chief seemed anxious to avoid being heard by Jim Osborn or Tarcedo. It would have been very easy for Walter to cry out and awaken the other outlaws; but the fact of the matter was, he much preferred a

little moving about to being confined in the retreat, now that his interest in the strange surroundings had worn away. He therefore made no resistance as Cabrillo led the bay silently towards the gate. Harry had just time to hide securely among the evergreens when the door creaked on its hinges, and the horse followed his master out and down the trail. The lad was now utterly at a loss to determine what was the best course to pursue. It was true that Cabrillo's separating from his comrades was of great advantage; for the boy had but one man to face now, whereas before there were three men against one boy, for Walter was of course thoroughly helpless to assist in any way.

Harry was surprised at the rapidity with which the bay picked his way down and around the bowlders, and concluded it best to keep the man in sight, at least until he had fully made up his mind. But following a man by day is rather more serious, though far less difficult, than trailing by night, and the lad realized that he stood in danger of being held up at any moment. He knew, too, that when a man of Cabrillo's character ordered hands up, there was only one thing in the world to do, and that was to put them up at once. Harry Martin was not the lad to desert a friend in need, however, and followed the retreating horse with a beating heart, always taking care to place a friendly bush or tree between the enemy and himself. By the time the lad reached the

base of the cliff, Cabrillo was heard splashing down stream at a rapid rate. So fast did he go, indeed, that Harry was forced to break into a run in order to keep the sound in his ears. It was far easier than it had been the previous night, although the bushes were just as thick and trails as scarce.

Harry thought he must have followed in this way for nearly four miles, at any rate until they reached the pebbly beach where the club had found the flag of truce on the day Eugene had been fired upon by Colonel Hillman's searching party. Here Cabrillo left the trail and started for the peak-crowned hill, at whose base the bear had been shot. He had glanced quickly behind him once or twice; but Harry had always been fortunate enough to be under or near a secure cover, and the lad was certain that he had not been discovered.

He plunged into the stream without a pause, and ran out upon the other side after the vanishing horse with its double burden. The Winchester, pistols, and lariat proved a very heavy load, and the lad was forced to grit his teeth more than once as he paused for breath. As Cabrillo began to ascend the hill from the south side, he slackened the bay's speed, thus giving Harry a chance to catch up, which he did after another long run. Then horse and riders disappeared into a strip of woodland that seemed to reach almost to the very summit of the second peak,

which by this time was beginning to catch the first rays of the rising sun.

"They'll go straight through that grove, I'll bet," said Harry, as he stumbled pluckily along in the rear, "and will bring up among those craggy peaks. I'm going to take my time." As he said this, he took a position that commanded a good view of the peaks, and watched closely for any further signs of the desperado.

He was not to be disappointed, for the horse was finally seen to leave the grove and struggle up the incline, disappearing behind a great, yellowish gray rock. It looked a long way off to the exhausted lad; but he nevertheless determined to follow on, and walked rapidly along until he reached the grove, where he discovered a cool spring. After a long drink he felt much better, and continued up the hill as fast as his legs would carry him. He had almost reached the edge of the woodland when the sound of flying hoofs arrested his attention, and he had barely concealed himself behind the trunk of a tree when Cabrillo swept past on the gallant bay.

"If I were a dime-novel hero now," said Harry, as the outlaw's sombrero looked as big as a circus hoop between the trees, "I should have to take a flying shot at that fellow, and he would throw up his hands and fall dead in his tracks. But those things don't happen in real life, and very few care to shoot at a

human being, except in self-defence, no matter how great a villain he is. I wonder, now, what he did with Walt." Harry knew that he could not find out by remaining behind a gigantic oak, and so followed the faint tracks left by the animal on the way up. As he thought, they led to the yellowish gray rock before mentioned; and then, after a series of turnings and twistings about great boulders, they ended at a small, dark tunnel that looked as black as night. The sound of running water was also heard, which left no doubt in the lad's mind that the camp was not far distant. The tunnel was evidently for the most part natural, and it was impossible for the lad to say how much had been opened by blasting. In some parts the rocks looked old and moss-covered, while in others they were split and presented an unnatural appearance.

"I hope there's an end to this darkness," said the boy, as his supply of matches threatened to give out before the end of the tunnel was reached. "It seems to go up into the skies. Halloo! There's daylight again." As he turned the last corner abruptly, he emerged into a beautiful little glade that seemed to be sheltered on all sides by the towering crags. Stunted oaks grew in profusion, and grapevines and undergrowth clustered thickly about, almost covering any signs of rocks or a rocky soil. It was too early in the day for the sun to penetrate the quiet glade;

but the lad could see that, owing to the height of the surrounding crags, the spot would always be cool in summer and well protected in winter.

Harry, very much interested, looked towards the centre and saw, almost entirely screened from view by the foliage, a neat little stone building, hardly fifteen feet square. It had undoubtedly been built by a mason, for the stonework was excellent, and,



what surprised the lad still more, the roof was shingled with regular factory shingles, and everything about the building looked as neat as a pin. A wall had been built about ten feet in front of the door, for the purpose of keeping the falling earth from blocking the path, and a flight of stone steps and rustic railing led down into the vale.

"I could understand this if we were in a gold country," said Harry, approaching the closed door with a beating heart. "But knowing as I do that

there's not an ounce of gold this side of the Rockies, it's hard to think of this as any kind of mining camp. I wonder how Cabrillo stumbled upon it."

Harry placed his ear to the door, and heard the regular breathing of a human being from within. There were no windows upon the north or west sides, and so the lad walked on tip-toe to the south side, and looked cautiously through a small square window. The room was fitted up in the most fantastic manner imaginable, and told more of the life of the owner than a volume of words.

The walls were papered irregularly with signed etchings and original sketches, between which rifles, pistols, rapiers, and bowie knives were crossed upon antlers and carved wooden pins in every sort of fanciful design. There was a Chinese teakwood stand crowned with a medley of silver smoking sets, while gray wolfskins and a couple of small Turkish rugs covered the floor.

Harry was too surprised and bewildered to move. A sigh finally sounded from within, which he felt came from Walter. Placing his arms upon the window-sill, he jumped up and looked down upon his chum, who lay stretched upon a divan directly beneath the window.

"Walt! Walt!" exclaimed Harry, in a voice he did not recognize as his own. "Are you hurt?"

"Harry! Is it you?" cried the much-abused lad, struggling desperately at the lariat. "I'm so glad you've come. Can't you get in?"

"Yes, I think so—wait a minute," replied the first speaker, entering the door almost at the same time. "Have you any idea where you are?"

"Not in the least," returned Walter, as the sash was removed from about his face. Then, as his eyes rested upon the unexpected surroundings, his face spoke his surprise far plainer than words.

Harry was but a moment in unfastening the leather thong that pinned his chum's arms behind him, and then rubbed the aching limbs and joints for a quarter hour, after which the boys stood up and looked about them.

"Did you ever see such a place?" asked Harry, as Walter looked out and saw that they were completely shut in by the lofty crags. "It was enough of a surprise to me after I had followed you for about four miles, and knew exactly where I was. But you must feel like a fish out of water, Walt. How far from the lodge do you suppose we are?"

"We must be twenty miles or more, for we've done a lot of riding together," replied Walter, continuing to rub his aching joints.

"You're far from right," said Harry, watching the entrance to the tunnel. "We're near the summit of the second peak, at whose base we shot the silver-tip

and coyotes," pointing northward in the direction of the valley.

"You don't say so!" exclaimed Walter in amazement. "And where was I last night?"

"On the cliff about four miles below the lodge on the left-hand side of the stream," promptly replied Harry. "They have another camp there."

"Then why did Wild Face bring me here?"

"He must have had his own reasons."

"And how did *you* get here?"

"I followed you up. But this won't lead to anything. Let me hear your story, and then I'll tell you mine," suggested Harry.

And so Walter commenced and told how he had been held up by Cabrillo and taken to the retreat, where he had spent the night, and how he had been blindfolded for the second time that morning, as Harry knew. Harry's story was somewhat longer; for he related all that had taken place since Walter left the lodge, ending by saying that he really believed Cabrillo's treasure, if the reports concerning him were true, was hidden in or near that very glade.

"It's his secret camp," said Harry, finally, "and he comes here only when he's tired of that crowd of ruffians. You see, he allowed you to go about as you liked in that other camp, but here he intended to keep you blindfolded the entire time."

Harry's reasoning was apparently sound, and so the

boys soon after began a thorough examination of the premises. Everything about the room suggested the man of culture and refinement, not unmixed with a suggestion of the wild and roving wanderer. For instance, there were cut glass tobacco jars upon the tabouret, filled with choice smoking tobacco, beside which lay a black stick of chewing tobacco, from the end of which a piece had been bitten. Then there was a long, itemized record of a cash account in a red leather book, which gradually got extremely small; and in the same book there was a weekly diary which had been dated from Honolulu, Lisbon, Odessa, and other cities scattered over the globe, in which the writer gave the amount of his winnings or losings, presumably at card playing, and these amounts were invariably figured in the cash account. The final entry in the diary had been made at Border City in September, 189-, and stated that the amount of cash on hand was \$2.67.

"There!" exclaimed Harry, "I believe he drifted down here when his money gave out, and has been going from bad to worse ever since. It's a pity, for the fellow undoubtedly possessed the instincts of a gentleman. What do you think of the room?"

"Extremely interesting and certainly artistic," replied Walter. "These water colors and drawings are by some of the best men. I wonder how he got them here."

"Oh, that was no great trick! When the Osage Indian schools were being built below here, there was a perfect line of trucks on the road all the time, I have heard Pietro say; and it was no trouble to have anything carried. That's probably how he got the shingles for the roof and the boards for the floor."

"I suppose so. Do you think he'll return this morning?"

"Hardly. He'll go back and see if the men have been released, and then he'll act accordingly."

"It's strange that none of the five hundred who started to search the country have been seen about," said Walter, selecting a couple of pistols that were crossed upon the wall. "I guess they don't relish the idea of being shot from the brush."

"Well, you'd never think that Cabrillo had been through so much," added Harry, with a sigh. "If we succeed in capturing him to-night, we'll be heroes in the community as long as we live; for his reputation as a train-robber has spread from ocean to ocean. Our luck so far has been simply marvellous. Are you in for holding him up?"

"Certainly."

"Then we'll get the flower of the flock, as Pietro says, and that will scatter those other two quicker than buck-shot. If it doesn't, we can steal a march on them some night after dark, and surprise them with six or eight lean rifle tubes."

"Harry, you're getting as bad as a dead-shot in a yellow-back novel. What's given you so much courage in the last day or two?"

"Well, you see it was one thing or the other: we either had to face these fellows and have it out, or we had to get out ourselves."

"Yes, it was coming to that, and I'm glad things are turning out so well for us. I think Cabrillo will be back before night, so it wouldn't be a bad idea to get something to eat now. Would you dare fire a rifle, Harry?"

"No; I don't think it's a good plan. Let's make a couple of sling shots and get a mess of small birds."

"Very well. It will give us something to do. Where is the spring?"

"Just below. The stone steps lead to it. Don't you think one of us should watch the entrance?"

"You haven't been here over fifteen minutes, and it's doubtful if he could make the trip to that cliff and return in much under an hour."

"That's so; but then it's always better to be on the safe side," replied Harry. "I'll cover the entrance while you see what's below. You must be very thirsty."

"I am. Cabrillo never offered to give me a drink, and I wouldn't ask him. He never said a word to-day, and seems to be put out about something."

"Yes; I suppose he couldn't understand those shots coming from the lodge."

While this conversation was taking place, Walter was making a cautious descent of the steep stone steps; for they had been used very little of late, and had begun to tumble in upon each other as the clay washed out. Walter entered the building through a break in the wall, and saw that he was in a room that was in reality the ground floor of the structure. A cool spring bubbled out from a rock that had been hollowed with cold chisels, and upon which were cut the names of Bill Holton, Perkins, and various dates going back as far as the seventies. There was no attempt at ornament or luxury in this room, which had evidently been used as a kitchen; for in one corner, opposite the spring, a fireplace had been built, and a hook had been driven into the stone, from which hung a black and dust-covered kettle. In fact, the only bits of color that relieved the sombre surroundings were the bright greens and reds of the printed express bills that fairly covered three large trunks that were piled upon each other in a third corner. The fourth corner contained a door that fitted into the break in the wall through which the boy had entered, and which was strengthened with irons that were two inches thick.

"You ought to have a look at that room, too," said Walter, after he had examined everything to his sat-

isfaction; "I didn't see anything of any eatables, however."

"Nor you won't, either," replied Harry, changing places with his chum. "The dust and cobwebs go to show that the place has been little inhabited of late."

Harry examined everything in the lower room carefully, even going so far as to open each of the trunks and search every nook and corner. But, as he expected, no part of Cabrillo's treasure was found, and he finally joined his chum to complete plans for the outlaw's capture.

It was agreed that the entrance to the glade was to be watched by one or the other constantly; for, as Walter said, if Harry's tracks were discovered by Cabrillo, the outlaw would be certain to return without delay, and in such a way that his coming would not soon be forgotten by them. The window at the south side of the stone house afforded an excellent position from which to guard the tunnel, and Harry accordingly stationed himself there with Walter's Winchester protruding over the sill, while Walter removed a couple of stout rubber bands from some papers and old weeklies he found in a tin box.

Many years had passed since Walter had made his last sling shot; but he never forgot the little weapon that had so fascinated him in his younger boyhood days, and was soon fastening the rubber

bands to a crutch he had cut from a very young maple. There was no loose shot among Cabrillo's ammunition, but plenty of shells, the largest of which were loaded with buck-shot.

Walter removed the end wads from a dozen of these and filled his pockets with the shot. A score of blackbirds had lighted in the glade, and were heard splashing and sporting in the cool water deep down in the dell.

"Get six or eight of those, Walt," said Harry, as his chum descended the steps. "They're just as good as turtle-doves."

The spring, after it left the stone basin, soaked its way through luxuriant grass into a little pool at the upper end of the glade. Walter caught a glimpse of the water through the trees, and made rapidly for it. The birds were indulging in an early morning bath, and did not appear to notice the lad's approach. They made a very pretty picture as they flashed like black diamonds there in a broad band of sunlight, and, if it had not been for the lad's increasing hunger, he would not have fired upon them. He also knew that Harry had not eaten any breakfast, and that he must be nearly famished after the long, hard trailing of the previous night and that morning. Walter therefore placed a shot into the leather, and drew upon a big fellow that had a handsome bright scarlet mark about his neck and breast.

Zip! sounded the rubber, the bullet striking the bird full on the wing, and bowling him over like a ninepin. The lad reloaded at once, and got two more, before the birds began to grow wild and take to the trees. The lad followed after, bagging another as he worked up from the dell and towards the end of the glade.

And now, for the second time since leaving the ranch, Walter was thoroughly terrified by having a flat stone hurled past his head and land in the bushes on his left. It brought him to a standstill with a wildly beating heart, causing him to drop the weapon he was holding, place his hands upon his pistols, and turn his eyes instinctively in the direction from which the stone had come. He caught a glimpse of a half-clad figure behind a dozen black and bended iron bars, and then he heard the rattle of the creature's boots as he ran back from the bars, out of sight. Walter thought it more than probable that the man, if a man he really was, had gone for his rifle, and the lad therefore dropped upon all-fours behind a nearby tree, his pistols cocked and ready for use. He had not long to wait, for the figure instantly reappeared, and then flitted back into the darkness like a deer, reappearing once more at the iron bars and falling upon his knees. Yes, it was a man; there could be no doubt of that. And, wild and cadaverous as he looked behind the bars, the lad nevertheless

feared him thoroughly, and was within an ace of calling his chum. But the fact that the creature was behind stout iron bars, and evidently without a weapon, reassured him after a moment, and his fear of Cabrillo began to revive in proportion. He, therefore, refrained from calling aloud.

As the man dropped upon his knees, he thrust his clasped hands through the bars in supplication, and pleaded for his freedom. Walter saw that the man was thoroughly defenceless, and he took courage at once. He arose to a crouching attitude and started resolutely for the bars.

"Well, who are you?" the lad asked in a harsh voice, that he thought at the time was rather more confident than he really felt.

At this the man leaped to his feet and ran back again, instantly reappearing and throwing himself flat upon his face.

"I'm Hank Dobson, I am ; and I've been livin' on dried steer these past six months," he replied, in a voice that sounded as if it were wholly out of practice. "Don't shoot, boss !"

"I'm not going to shoot," replied Walter, peering into the cave. The cliffs rose forty or fifty feet high at this point, which had gradually crumbled during past years, and had fringed their bases with masses of broken stone. Probably fifty cubic feet of this fallen rock had been scraped away about the entrance

of the cave, and iron bars had been drilled into the rock, and were held securely in position by a cross piece of iron chain and lock. The rocks about the entrance were firm and hard, and Hank Dobson was as securely imprisoned as though he were confined in a government vault.

"Six months!" repeated Walter. "Who imprisoned you?"

"Wild Face. Didn't you know?"

"Not I. They're not our style," was the boy's reply.

"So I thought, mate, so I thought," said the man, viewing our hero's leather boots and neat corduroy suit with childish pleasure. "But who are you?" he asked a moment later, his rusty voice not unmixed with startled slyness.

"My name is Walter Hillman, and I live with my parents at the Salt Fork Ranch. At present, I am hunting with a party of friends in this region."

"So I thought, lad, so I thought. It might have been you shootin' day before yesterday," he said, with a look of great shrewdness. "Did you hear me yell?"

"No; we did not," Walter answered.

"Lad, I would have given five thousand to have been heard yesterday," the man continued, with the air of a millionaire.

"Five thousand dollars!" exclaimed Walter, watch-

ing the strange antics of the man with breathless attention. First he would wink slyly at the lad, and motion him nearer the bars, and then he would endeavor to tear out one of the irons with all his energy. The presence of Walter on the outside of the cave seemed finally to drive him out of his senses, for he began walking the floor rapidly, in a crouching atti-



tude, as the cave was not more than five feet high. He ran his fingers through his hair like a villain in a play, and then, all at once, he stopped short off and sent up a cry that echoed and reëchoed from the towering crags, and caused the patient Harry to desert his post and rush out towards the sound.

“Silver and gold! silver and gold! silver and gold!” he wailed. “Lad, let me out and I’ll make yer rich!”

He ended the cry with one awful, long-drawn scream, which sent the whole flock of blackbirds above the glade with a simultaneous whir, and led Walter to believe that the man had really gone mad. Harry's voice was at this moment heard hailing him from the bottom of the vale.

CHAPTER XV

THE LAST OF THE OUTLAWS

"COME up here, Harry," called Walter, in response to his chum's cry; "I've found a wild man in a cage!"

These words fell upon Harry's ear clearly, but they made no impression whatever. The horrid scream that had followed the unknown's cry, told the boy that something dreadful was taking place, and he lost no time in rushing to Walter's assistance.

"Where is it?" asked the lad, as he struggled up the steep bank further down the glade.

"Up this way," replied Walter, smiling unconsciously as he noted the determined expression of Harry's pale face. As Harry came up, Walter pointed with his pistol into the cave. Hank Dobson was once more flat upon his face, and was crying, "Silver and gold! silver and gold!" and so on, in a voice that penetrated every nook and corner of the glade, and whose mournful echoes made the lads' courage sink within them.

As Harry's eyes rested upon the nondescript, half-dressed in his tattered garments, and then upon the

stout black bars that imprisoned him, he could not have been more surprised if a rhinoceros had charged upon him in that very glade.

"So!" said the lad, as soon as he could find his tongue. "Who and what does this fellow say he is, and what is he doing here?"

"He says he is Hank Dobson, and that he has been living on dried steer for six months."

"How on earth did you get into such a place, Hank?" asked Harry, as he caught sight of the man's emaciated face. He said this in a calm and collected manner, which he was far from feeling. If the man had really been imprisoned in that place for six months, and had lived on uncooked beef, he certainly was not to blame for any eccentricities, and was entitled to the kindest consideration and aid.

"It's a short tale, lad, and one that'll not surprise you. Have you a little tobac' along of you? It's a long time since I filled a pipe, my lad."

He stood clutching the bars as he had often done in his efforts to escape, and Harry saw that his hands were mere skeletons. He thought of the tobacco he had seen in the stone house, and ran to get it.

When he returned, the man stretched his hand between the bars and grasped it eagerly, stuffing the tobacco into the bowl of the chief's brierwood as if his life depended upon it. It was extraordinary how his spirits returned after he had drawn quietly at the

pipe for a few moments, and a more natural color came to his face.

"Ah, lad! That's food and drink to me, my pipe. Wild Face had pounds of it shut up there, but he knowed better than to pass any through these bars, and you can stake your life on it!" And he tried to punch Walter knowingly in the ribs.

"Why is he keeping you imprisoned here?" asked Harry, who wished to determine what was best to be done with the man. "If you will be kind enough to tell us your story, we shall be glad to help you out of your difficulties."

At this the man motioned the boys to come nearer, which they did reluctantly. "And I'll make you both rich," he whispered, with an air of great importance. "Hank Dobson, you'll say, is all right. He made you both rich."

The boys looked at each other, and were very much inclined to burst into a hearty laugh. The idea of that nondescript having even a good coat seemed too improbable to ever come true.

"Rich or poor, let's hear what you have to say for yourself," said Walter, as he commenced to pick and clean the four birds he had shot. "Cabrillo may return at any time, and then perhaps you won't have a chance."

"Well, if Wild Face jumps in an' finds me out of this cage, I'm as good as pork, an' I know it. You

see, it was this way: Along about the middle of last winter the boys was gettin' pretty blue over at the camp, an' things wasn't pannin' out to suit any of us. We holds up a couple of trains, but the cap'n gives us the worst of it on the divide, at least I says he does, an' we have a shot or two pass in the dark, and p'r'aps another to show the link wasn't sealed, nohow. Well, one night about Christmas, for I'd been keepin' track of the days pretty reg'lar then, the boys set out with the cap'n, but I kicked over the traces an' hung back," — with a sly wink at the boys, — "an' hung back to square myself with the cap'n. They was gone a'most the whole night, an' when they got back they was two short, an' had made a pretty short haul, now I tell you, an' was down in the gills. The cap'n never let on I was livin' for a couple of days, an' then he kind of opened up the old score by using a sandbag on my nut, an' bringin' me up here."

"But he surely didn't intend to starve you on account of your little difference, did he?" asked Harry, too bewildered with the series of exciting experiences he had gone through to think clearly. "He must be a perfect fiend."

"Not altogether on 'count of the little hard feelin'," replied the other, knowingly; "but mostly 'cause of that. It seems that some one had faked a tin box durin' the cap'n's absence, and the cap'n kind of guessed 'twas me. It might as well have been, for

I've been boxed up here and fed dried meat for more 'n six months, without so much as a word from the cap'n, except for him to ask me if I think I could find that box, and me always answerin' I never so much as saw-it. But, now, let me tell you, lads. I can see you're as smart as timber-wolves, an' quick to see through a crack. Am I right? Hank Dobson thinks he is, and says you're the lads to make five thousand without so much as turnin' a hair. An' I've got the gold, lads, an' you know it. Silver and gold! silver and gold! heaps, lads, heaps of it!"

As he finished, he knocked the ashes from his pipe into the palm of his left hand, and, stooping low, danced gleefully about, his rough boots grating on the stone floor.

"If that is all you have to say, my man, we'll go and talk the matter over," said Harry, as he met Walter's eye with his own.

"You'll come back?" he asked, placing his face between the iron bars.

"Yes; you can depend upon it. And we'll bring you a bite of lunch," replied Walter.

"*And* a glass of grog?" he added, with a look that said he needed it.

"If there's any there," Walter answered.

"Ah, you're a good lad," the boys heard him say, in a voice that showed that he was very much relieved.

"It's plain to see that he was the one who took Cabrillo's box," said Harry, as the lads reached the stone house.

"Perfectly," replied the other.

"Well, he either got a large amount of money, and is determined to keep it, or he's the most unfortunate man I ever heard of. Probably the former."

"Yes; I suppose he thinks that Cabrillo will give in when he sees he can't get it. But I don't believe that. Now, let me take the rifle and guard the entrance, while you start a fire and broil those black-birds for Dobson. By the way, that name reminds me that he is entered at the outlaws' camp as a dead man. How do you account for that?"

"Probably Cabrillo considered him as good as dead. How did it read?"

"'Dobson, he bit the dust,' or something of that sort. I don't just remember," answered Walter.

"We'll tell him that when we bring him his breakfast. It'll be a good appetizer."

"No doubt. Are you going to give him any liquor? There's some in this stone jug."

"Yes; half a glass with water," replied Harry, as he struck a match to some twigs he had placed upon the hearth, while Walter ascended the steps and watched the entrance from the window.

The lads felt it their obvious duty to see to the wants of the imprisoned outlaw without delay, and

forced themselves to forget their own stomachs for the time being.

Harry found a tin plate in a wooden box, upon which he placed the blackbirds as they were broiled. He then poured a tin cup full of brandy, and filled a small tin pail with water from the spring. As Harry approached the captive with the viands, he felt that it was little enough to offer a starving man, but all that could be expected under the circumstances. The outlaw reached through the bars and grasped one bird after another, crushing them quickly with his teeth, and swallowing bones and all; he then drank a little water, after which he took the tin cup in his hand, first smelling the liquor, then drinking a swallow or two, smacking his lips and lingering on the taste, with the air of a connoisseur.

"Dobson, I'm afraid you're a little partial to grog," said Harry, pleasantly, as the man seated himself and prepared to drain the cup.

"Ah, lad, you know that's right," he replied, throwing back his head and allowing the brandy to flow down as if it were running into a two-inch pipe. "And the cap'n always did have good liquors, the cap'n did. But I say, boys, you'll get me out to-night, won't you? The key to that there lock that I've tried day an' night to bust is on the cap'n's chain. He used to come to me an' say: 'Have you found the box, Hank? I've got the key ready to let

you go, if you've found the box,' an' I'd always tell him I'd never seen the box." As the prisoner concluded, he grinned from ear to ear, and winked knowingly at our hero, who soon joined his chum. It was now nearly noon, and the boys were about as hungry, they thought, as they had ever been before in their lives. Accordingly, Walter shot more birds with his silent weapon, and the lads devoured them about as quickly as the starving prisoner had done.

During the afternoon, the outlaw was frequently visited by one or the other of the lads, and he promised faithfully not to make any sort of an outcry if he happened to see his former chief enter the glade from the tunnel, which was but half screened from view by reason of a break in the trees.

As evening advanced, Harry and Walter began to fear the approach of darkness. They had no means of knowing whether or not Cabrillo would return alone, if at all, and the thought of spending a night in that spot was far from pleasant. They were not the sort of boys to allow gloomy thoughts to get the better of them, however, and were soon busy preparing supper. A medley of small birds helped to make up a tempting dish, to which they all did full justice. The prisoner begged so hard for another glass of grog that the lads finally consented, and indeed it was a real pleasure to see him drink it.

The sun's parting rays, after lighting the west

faces of the rocks brilliantly for half an hour, gradually disappeared, and the soft air of a calm summer evening, as twilight came on apace, looked purple and misty. Although the evening breeze failed to penetrate any part of the glade, the air was nevertheless fresh and cool, and a heavy dew pressed the odors from the grasses.

The boys leaned upon the window-sill and watched the tunnel closely, scarcely raising their voices above a whisper. It proved to be a faultless night; a night to sail a summer sea, with topsails set and wind enough to hold the fluttering pennant from the mast, while the mandolins and guitars are fairly drowned by the joyous college songs that float over the water. Not a cloud veiled the brightness of the stars, and not a sound disturbed the oppressive silence.

The thought of returning through that lengthy cavern at such a time was not inviting, to say the least, for it was not at all improbable that the brigand chief would return at any hour. The moonlight was shed about the house in the full of the young night, and the summits of the craggy walls looked like phantom forms against the clear, cold sky.

The lads turned and looked about them; there were all the dust-covered belongings of the outlaw, just as they had seen them that very morning, only now but duskily shining through the darkness. Each article, no doubt, had a history, for the man's life had

evidently been one long, sealed chapter. The presence of genuine Turkish rugs and cut glass in such a country seemed bizarre and incomprehensible; and the fact that one of a noted band of robbers had been found nearly starved to death in that very glade did not help to quiet our heroes' pulses.

"Don't you think you'd better get a rifle, Walt? Have a look at some of those," said Harry, pointing to a collection of guns that stood in the corner. They were of all sorts and sizes, and Walter finally selected a thirty-eight calibre Winchester. Harry then unwound his lariat, which he placed upon the broad sill, all coiled and ready for use.

"How are you going to open operations if he comes in alone?" asked Walter, his voice trembling in spite of himself. "It doesn't seem probable that he'd leave me here without food or drink for more than a whole day."

"That's what I think, myself," replied the former; "and that's why he may be expected at any moment. Pietro's method was very effective, and I think we'd better try that. Whatever we do, we must move like chain lightning, and take no chances whatever."

As Harry ceased speaking, the very crags seemed to tremble with the report of a rifle that rang high into the night, and echoed and reëchoed again and again from the tunnel-passage. Before silence had reëstablished herself, before the lads could place the

direction of the sound, the hoarse voice of a man was heard unintelligibly, followed by a great tumult in the passage-way, as if two great beasts had clashed together; and then a perfect fusillade of shots threatened to blow up the cavern. There could be no doubt that they were the frenzied voices of human beings; for the volley of oaths, as the lads continued to give ear, grew clearer and louder and more terrible as the men advanced. Then, as if he had been shot out of a cannon, Cabrillo appeared in a broad beam of silvery moonlight, slanting through a break in the crags, and falling white and serene across the glade. The outlaw carried a streaming knife between his teeth, while in his right hand he held a pistol, and in his left the handle of a square tin box. He dropped the box as he faced about like a flash, and fell upon all fours. Harry and Walter, their hearts beating wildly, expected every second to see Pietro or Larraby appear in the mouth of the tunnel, and were consequently greatly relieved when the chief called out:—

“Stand back, Dody, or I’ll end your dance!” in a voice that shook like a strained sheet in a gale.

“End it, then, yer thief! You’ve killed Jim, now kill me!” cried the black-bearded bandit, as he followed the lean rifle tube of his Winchester from the mouth of the tunnel, and drew upon the other.

Flash! the rifle spoke once, and the bullet landed where the robber had been, burying itself in the turf.

The next instant the chief's pistol flashed thrice, with wonderful quickness, before Tarcedo could double the lever of his weapon for a return fire. The outlaw's hands flew straight above his head, and he fell back dead, but still twitching.

It had all happened in less than twenty seconds, and had left the lads confused and terrified beyond description. They had never seen anything or anybody move with such lightning rapidity before, and their fears of the unavoidable encounter consequently grew in proportion. Harry thought that Cabrillo had moved three times to the wildcat's once.

And now another terror smote the lads to their very hearts, for Hank Dobson, who had faithfully kept his promise not to cry out up to this time, now began to yell, "Silver and gold! silver and gold!" and "A fling from the cap'n's cask!" at the top of his lungs, which was saying a good deal.

The lads thought that the cry would lead to their being captured, and were therefore greatly surprised and relieved when Cabrillo took no notice whatever of it, but advanced and turned over the dead body of the outlaw with the toe of his boot, after which he picked up the box and approached the house.

The time for decisive action had now arrived. Harry and Walter took up their positions on opposite sides of the door, as Pietro and Larraby had done at the lodge, and waited for the door to open,

"If he looks in the window," whispered Harry, whose back was facing the opening, "you'll have to shoot, or he'll shoot us."

As he finished, the sound of Cabrillo's footsteps was heard without, and the door was opened without delay. Walter, who had stood facing the window with an upraised pistol in his right hand, struck at the outlaw's head first. The blow descended swift and sure and with crushing force; but the heavy brim and material of the robber's sombrero caused it to glance slightly.

At the same time Harry, who had clubbed his rifle, struck from the other side. He stood so close to the wall that the stock of course struck the edge of the door as he drew it back, and a half-stunning blow was all that fell. The outlaw, for his part, turned like a flash and ran full into Walter's arms, who closed upon him. Harry tried in vain to land another blow, but as the two struggled furiously, it was impossible, from his cramped position and with a long weapon, to be sure of anything. He therefore dropped the Winchester and tackled the bandit about the waist with all his strength. Crash! the three struck the wall with force enough to carry stone and all, and pictures, pistols, and guns went down in a heap. Cabrillo never uttered a cry, but struggled like a madman. Another crash, and they struck the door, then tripped over the tin box on their way out,

The next second they were struggling over the bank together, just missing the steep flight of steps, and crashing through the bushes like a trio of infuriated elephants. The tin box followed down the steps, ringing with the sound of hard money.

As they fell into the spring together, Harry rained blow after blow into the outlaw's face, while Walter from behind fought desperately with his arms. Then Harry caught him about the throat, and tightened his grip until Cabrillo's tongue protruded, and he ceased his gallant struggles.

"Get the lariat, quickly," said Harry, between his gasps, as he felt the man's breath go out altogether.

Walter was away and back again in less time than it takes to tell it, and José Cabrillo was bound hand and foot with all sorts of knots and fastenings, to the lads' inexpressible joy. They trembled and panted for some time, like a brace of greyhounds after the chase; and then, after lifting the worsted outlaw into the lower room, they bathed their faces and hands and dressed the man's wounds. It was extraordinary how gallant had been his fight after Walter's blow with the Colt revolver, for the wound had by this time swollen to the size of a turkey's egg. Harry's blow, too, had opened up a gash in the back of his head, ugly enough to render any ordinary man unconscious for a dozen hours.

His eyes, too, were badly swollen where Harry had

peppered them with his fists, but he never ceased his terrible oaths and tirades long enough to have them bathed with the cool spring water.

It was really astonishing how Cabrillo's capture had affected the lads. Tired as they were from the excitement of the past days, they now began to whistle and sing as they went about making preparations for the night.

The dead outlaw was left in the lower room, with a blanket thrown over him, while Cabrillo was finally carried up the bank and stretched upon the floor. The tin box, which the lads supposed contained the treasure, was then placed under the table; and the boys, too weary to discuss or do anything else, took possession of the divans, falling into a sound sleep almost immediately, from which they were awakened by the sound of Hank Dobson's voice calling for something to eat.



CHAPTER XVI

FURTHER DEVELOPMENTS



THE boys were upon their feet in a moment. After seeing that Cabrillo was safe and sound, their first thought was of the treasure box, and towards this they cast their eyes at once. There it stood, just as they had left it, upon the crosspiece beneath the table. It was a large box, probably two feet each way, and quite heavy; it was painted black, with a broad band of white on the cover, and the handle was also white. Walter noted these things casually, and then, as Hank Dobson continued to call, he decided to go to him, and started to leave the house.

"Take him a cup of brandy," said Harry, as he divined his chum's intention. "It'll be some hours before we can get him anything fit to eat. By the way, perhaps Mr. Cabrillo would like a glass."

The outlaw did not reply to this, but looked at the lad with an expression that told more plainly than

words what his feelings were. Walter ran down the bank, and was soon approaching the prisoner, who was standing at the bars.

"Mornin', sir," said the man, grinning as his eye fell upon the tin cup. "You've brought your pardner a nip, I see. That's a good lad. Thank ye, says I, and here she goes," guzzling the liquor as he spoke.

"I thought you promised not to cry out if Cabrillo returned," said Walter, as the man handed him the cup.

"Not I, lad; I never said a word, mind that."

"Then it must have been the liquor; but it doesn't matter, for we got the best of your captain last night."

"Not Wild Face!" cried the man, running his arm through the bars and endeavoring to pinch the lad. "Say,"—with a sly wink,—“you didn't see anything of a tin box along of him, did you?"

"What kind of a tin box?" replied Walter, who did not know exactly how to answer the man.

"Aha!" he returned, with a knowing laugh. "You're a cute boy, so you are, a cute boy. But Hank Dobson, he's pretty fly, too, don't you know. Well, now," he continued, after a brief pause, "it might have been red, or white, or yaller; an' then again it might have been black with a white stripe. You don't by no means know, an' Hank Dobson won't say till you douse the glim an' fake the cap'n's key for this here bird-cage,"

"Well, Hank," replied Walter, who knew now that Cabrillo had, by some hook or crook, discovered the hiding-place of the box Dobson had stolen from him, and that the very box was at that moment less than a hundred yards distant, "we'll have something good for you to eat before many hours, and plenty of it. Don't worry."

"Good for you, lad; you're honest, an' I can see it with these deadlights closed."

"Harry," said Walter in a whisper, as he reached the house, "that is the very box Dobson stole from Cabrillo, for he described it just now. Let's leave quietly, for the camp is seven or eight miles distant, and return as soon as possible with Pietro, Larry, and the fellows. There's nothing now to fear."

"Are you sure that Dody said that Jim was killed?"

"Yes; those were his very words."

"Then we'll have to hide the box. It's too far to carry it."

"Very well."

Accordingly, the lads entered the house and removed the box. This nearly drove Cabrillo mad, and indeed his tirades were terrible to hear. The treasure was carefully hidden between a couple of bowlders, and some rocks and dead branches placed upon it. When this was finished, the lads took a last look at Cabrillo's fastenings, and then, filling their

pockets with a goodly supply of matches, began the descent through the winding tunnel.

As they reached the open after a long march, their eyes fell upon Cabrillo's horse, and another that had been owned, presumably, by the dead outlaw. The animals were grazing about the entrance to the tunnel, and, as they made no effort to escape, the boys were soon in the saddles.

"Didn't those rascals have the finest set of gallopers you ever saw?" said Walter, as Cabrillo's bay started off with Harry. "I believe that fellow can beat Prince Royal as far as you can throw a stone."

"Well, if he can, I'll keep him — at least for a little while — and give Arthur the Prince."

"Nobody is more entitled to him than you," replied Walter, recollecting his encounter with Cabrillo with a shrug of the shoulders.

After the lads had emerged from the woods, they struck a stiff gallop, and kept it up until they were obliged to ford the creek just below the lodge. As they galloped through the jack-oaks, they caught sight of their chums, who had gathered about Larraby. The cowboy's white pony stood by, cropping the grass, and it was evident to our heroes that Pietro was delivering last instructions.

"Hurry," said Walter, "and they'll see us before Larry mounts for his journey."

The boys touched the horses' flanks with their

heels, and the gallop was quickened to a full run. Over the grass-land they fairly flew, thundering up to the lodge, and waving their sombreros triumphantly. The sight of their comrades, so strangely mounted, was a welcome surprise to the very-much-worried members of the club, but not half the surprise that Harry's first words were.

"You needn't start for the ranch, Larry," said the lad, as he reined in the bay before the astonished men and boys. "We'll need you in other quarters this very morning."

"What quarters?" asked the club in chorus.

"At Cabrillo's camp. Fellows, we've heard the last of the outlaws. Wild Face lies bound hand and foot about eight miles from here, the other two are dead, and the fourth is as securely caged as a panther at a circus."

"A fourth!" repeated the club.

"Yes, a fourth; but that is a long story, though well worth the telling. After we put these thorough-breds up, we'll give you full particulars from beginning to end."

Accordingly, Walter began and related all he had gone through up to the time he heard Harry's voice at the stone house, and then Harry told everything from the time he had deserted his post and had followed Tarcedo down the stream, describing vividly Walter's strange meeting with Hank Dobson, the out-

law's luxurious camp, and the fight in which the desperado was finally worsted. So interested were his friends that they did not move a muscle during the story, and, when Harry had at last finished, they were too nonplussed to speak at all. Tony, however, came to their rescue.

"Laws, honey," said the old negro, grinning from ear to ear, "lemme get my han's ober my mouf."

"Hurrah for Harry Martin!" cried the boys, throwing their sombreros into the air, and dancing merrily about. "Hurrah for Harry Martin! What's the matter with Harry Martin?" And then they answered with a gusto that made that young man crimson to his temples, "He's all right!"

"Boys," said the hostler in a hoarse voice, coming up to the lads, "you're a couple of bricks, and there's my hand on it. What say you, Larry?"

Larraby said the same thing, so did Tony, and the club members again and again, until they were as hoarse as so many crows.

"Tony, get us up a good lunch," said Walter, "and plenty of it. Master Harry and I will have a bite now, too. Larry, you can remain with Tony and guard the prisoners, while the rest of us will go for Cabrillo, Dobson, and the dead men."

Pietro thought this the very best thing to do, and the horses were accordingly saddled at once.

"You can take Prince Royal, Arthur," said Harry,

very much to his brother's surprise ; " and Paul ought to have Dody's horse."

This plan was readily accepted. Walter jumped up behind Harry ; for he had decided to stop in at the first camp and get Leveller. When everything was at last complete, and Pietro, after distributing the liberal lunch among the different saddle-bags, had mounted with the rest, the six horses cantered down the prairie.

The boys soon forgot the troubles of the past days ; for they realized that they were now free to enjoy their hunts as they pleased, and had, in addition, broken up a notorious gang of criminals.

" We'll drive the ridges for deer now, and won't have to worry about anything," said Walter, who felt as gay as a lark over Cabrillo's capture.

" Yes ; and we won't have to ride any mustangs, either," added Arthur, who did not endeavor to conceal his great admiration for Prince Royal.

" Well, I'll stick by Osage Chief," continued Eugene. " You fellows may throw dust in my eyes for the first mile, but after that you'll find that I'll see more of the chase than any of you."

" That may all be," returned Paul, looking like a jockey on the dead outlaw's horse. " But all the same a broncho isn't in it with the long, sweeping stride of a thoroughbred."

" Do you think these are thoroughbreds ? " asked

Harry, who was always at home when the subject of horse was introduced.

"Thoroughbreds, yes, every inch of 'em; a better looking horse than that bay never sported silk," replied the hostler.

"I'm glad to hear it," said Harry. "Fellows, I feel we're about to have some coursing that will leave all our other experiences far in the shade. I'm in favor of starting out early to-morrow after coyotes and rabbits. Pietro and Tony have got the dogs in grand shape."

"Grand shape it may be," added Jack; "but it makes one hungry to see them. I counted every bone in their bodies this morning."

"They're about right to run," said Pietro. "And you'll have to ride to keep in sight of 'em."

"Who'll be the first in at the deaths?" asked Eugene.

"I'm inclined to think the bay will," answered the former. "He's a proud rascal."

"And which of the dogs?" added Paul.

"That's harder to say, Master Paul," replied the hostler. "It'll be betwixt Saxony and Tasso, or I miss my guess."

"Well, now, fellows," said Harry, as the club neared the outlaws' retreat, "while in Rome, we must do as the Romans do, and so we shall have to enter the creek right here."

When the club reached the spring, Harry dismounted and fastened his lariat to the limb just as he had seen Cabrillo do, and knew Tarcedo had done. Pietro examined the trail in the water carefully, ending by saying it was marvellous how well they had succeeded in hiding any tell-tale marks of the animals' hoofs.

The club dismounted at the creek, carefully examining everything of interest about the entrance. The limb which had performed such good service as a blind, was of oak, very heavily leaved, and growing at right angles with its trunk, which was fifteen feet distant, but very near the edge of the water. Osage orange hedge, willows, and other undergrowth had been planted all about the oak, on either side of the brooklet, so thick that only an occasional glimpse could be had of any part of the creek.

"I wonder how they ever got the marks of the horses' hoofs out of the spring bottom," said Arthur, who was trying to determine, from the appearance of the bed of the spring, how long the trail had been used.

"This solves the mystery," cried Harry, taking nothing more nor less than a garden rake from under the willows. "You see, the bed of the spring is sandy and rocky, and a little careful raking every day or two would lead one to suppose a horse had never entered it. As they approached from below

and above, through the creek, smoothing the sandy bottom of the stream to the centre was quite enough to mislead a Pinkerton detective, especially when the water is at all roily."

"A very good explanation," added Jack. "And then, too, very few would ever think of looking for trails in a creek bottom."

"That's so, Master Jack," agreed Pietro. "And very few ever cared to hunt 'em down, except in a half-hearted way."

If the lads had been in attendance at the final championship foot-ball match of the season, watching the fleet-footed half-back hotly pursued by a half score of plunging athletes, his long hair streaming out behind, they could not have been more interested than they were as they led the horses up the cliff, and entered the retreat after Harry had scaled the barricade and had seen Jim Osborn lying dead upon the grass, a double shot in the region of his heart.

Everything was new to our heroes, excepting of course Walter and Harry. Walter brought the bay into the enclosure, leading him straight to the corral, where he found Leveller and the other horses restlessly pawing the ground. Harry followed him out, while the others examined the log-house and its contents, the curious marks and names upon the wall, and were, as Walter had been, greatly surprised at the neatness and solidity of the structure.

"We ought to place Osborn in a bunk until we return," said the hostler, looking down upon the man's white, lean face. "Cabrillo must be a wonderful shot. Those are pistol marks, and not two inches apart."

While the others were carrying the dead man into the building, Harry and Walter fed and watered the horses. The others soon joined them, and each animal was thoroughly discussed.

"You won't have to name the bay, Harry," said Eugene, as he stepped into the animal's stall, "for here's his name cut in this rock."

Harry followed Eugene into the stall, and saw that the names of a half-dozen animals had been cut upon the boulder, with the dates opposite each. The last name was Ramblewild, and the date corresponding was May, 189-.

"That does save me lots of thought," replied Harry, as he glanced at the names again. "I suppose the horse gets that name from not running off when you turn him loose, and is allowed to ramble wild."

"Here, here, none of that," cried Jack. "But if you insist upon being a Sherlock Holmes, tell us what the name of Paul's horse signifies."

"What is it?" asked Harry, as he approached the stall.

"Exile," answered the other.

"Give it up, unless the outlaw felt very repentant when he named the animal," said Harry.

"Have you seen all you wish to see, fellows?" asked Walter, as he saddled Leveller. "We've got quite a long ride before us, and I think it would be as well to start at once."

"Very well," they answered. "Let's be off."

And so the gallop to the peak-crowned hill was begun and completed in the course of an hour. Although they had received an accurate description of Cabrillo's secret camp from Harry and Walter, they were nevertheless very impatient to see the strange surroundings, and particularly anxious to have a look at "the wild man in the cage."

The horses were tied in the shade of the great bowlders, and the journey through the tunnel was begun, Harry leading the way. As the end was reached, the lads saw at once that their chums' descriptions, though accurate, had failed to impress them with the wonderful charm of the place. It seemed, as they said, that they had suddenly been transported to a tropical scene; for the trees and wild flowers looked as though they had never known a winter wind, and the birds sang as if they had never been driven to the shelter of a ledge, nor remembered a battle with wind and rain.

As the boys approached the house, Cabrillo's oaths and tirades were frightful to hear, and the lads, after

they had seen all they cared to, left the building. Harry and Pietro examined the outlaw's bindings thoroughly, and then, when the lad had filled a cup with brandy, followed the others out to see the prisoner.

Hank was full of his strange antics; but sound reason seemed to return upon sight of the tin cup, and he praised Harry unstintingly, telling him over and over that he was the best boy in the world.

"And now, before we lunch, we may as well have a look at that tin box," said Arthur, forgetting for the moment that Hank had set great store by that very tin box.

"Tin box, is it?" he cried passionately. "Not my tin box with the white stripe, lad?"

"No, not yours, Hank," replied Harry, soothingly. "Will you have a little lunch now?"

"Grub, did you say? Well, I reckon. An' did you bring a sour cumcuber?" he must have meant cucumber. "It's been a'most a year since I had any sour cumcubers."

"Yes, we brought some for you, and will have them here in a jiffy. Pietro, run and get my saddle-bag at the house. It's under the table."

Pietro returned at once with the article in question, and Harry handed Hank the lunch he had been so thoughtful as to tell Tony to prepare. It contained sardines, a dozen pickles, well browned, buttered

corn-bread, a pound of dried beef, and a bottle of tomato catsup. It was astonishing how quickly the man spread the pickles and catsup upon the corn-bread, and then devoured it all more quickly than a ragamuffin can make way with a purloined banana.

"The poor fellow hasn't tasted any relish for six months," said Jack, pitifully, "and I don't blame him."

"Ah, lads, that's right," replied Hank, endeavoring for the tenth time to pinch the boys; "but I'm a-bankin' on gettin' out when you fake the cap'n's keys. He wears 'em 'round his neck, lads, you can bank on it."

Leaving the outlaw busy with the beef, the club returned and searched the chief's pockets, ending by removing the cord from about his neck. Hank had told the truth. There were the man's keys, a dozen or more, of the very finest patterns, with which the lads unlocked a quartet of small boxes, two of bird's-eye maple, which were inlaid with the supposed initials and monogram of the man upon their respective covers. Not the letters J. C., but L. W. H., which the lads conjectured stood for the outlaw's real name. Although the house was searched thoroughly, and many interesting and costly articles were brought to view upon one or two of which the same initials had been engraved, nothing further was learned of the man's strange life.

"He's no more Mexican than you or I, Harry,"

said Walter, as the boys went to get the box, "and I should like to know more about him."

The saddle-bags were placed upon the ground just outside of the lower room, and, after Cabrillo had been fed, our friends themselves enjoyed a hearty and never-to-be-forgotten lunch.

"These are the marks of our fight with Cabrillo," said Walter, pointing to the ploughed ground about the brooklet.

"You fellows have done yourselves proud, and have immortalized the club," said Paul, to which the others all agreed.

"But perhaps we haven't recovered the treasure," said Harry, fitting a key to the box. "A few seconds will show."

And a few seconds did show; so much, in fact, that the lads' eyes fairly left their heads: jewels, diamonds, watches, and great rolls of bills of high denominations, and all sorts of odd trinkets of value, together with gold enough to take the entire club twice around the world. That was the treasure for which Cabrillo had spent the last years, and which had cost the lives of so many honest men. What sorrow and poverty, what gaping wounds from Winchesters, what deceits and cruelty it had cost in amassing, no one alive could tell.

"This explains the fight last night," said Harry, taking out a leather bag, upon which Tarcedo's name

was burned faintly, and another upon which Redwood's name was lettered in ink. "Cabrillo robbed his comrades, and they had it out, much to their sorrow. You see, here are bags belonging to Snaky and Osborn."

"Yes; and containing about the same amount we found upon Firefly," added Eugene.

When lunch was finished, the boys, at Pietro's suggestion, decided to make the return, and plans for the release and binding of Hank Dobson were discussed, none of which seemed judicious.

"The tin-cup racket is the best," said Harry, going for the brandy. "When he sticks his arm through the bars, Pietro, grab it, while I'll open the gate and slip the lariat about him. He may as well know sooner or later what he is to expect."

This was accordingly done, and the last of the outlaws was bound hand and foot.

Paul then took the box and led the way through the tunnel, closely followed by Pietro and Harry, who carried Cabrillo, and they were followed in turn by Walter and Arthur, carrying the dead body of the outlaw Tarcedo, while Jack and Eugene brought up the rear with Hank Dobson.

"And now, Mr. José Cabrillo," said Walter, when they had reached the horses, "allow me to assist you into the saddle, and tie you as you tied me the other day. 'Turn about is fair play,' you know."

And thereupon Walter freed the outlaw's legs, lifting him, with Pietro's assistance, upon Leveller, and securing his legs to the horse's flanks just as the bandit had done with him.

"It's not very pleasant, you know," he said with a smile, "but then I guess you'll stand it."

The other two were taken upon Blue Rocket and Ramblewild, the dead body being firmly lashed to the saddle and supported by Pietro, who insisted on changing mounts with Harry.

The club struck a good pace under the circumstances, and were approaching the lodge in less than an hour and a half, having stopped for Osborn's body on the way.

"We've got some visitors," said Pietro, screening his eyes with one hand, while he held the reins and supported the dead body with the other.

"Uncle John!" exclaimed the club, their cheeks glowing with pride.

"Not Mr. Hillman," replied the hostler, "nor the colonel, either."

"Who is it, then?" asked the boys.

"A party from Linwood, and a couple of soldiers. Boys, you'll be spared the trouble of a trip to the ranch, and you'll be made heroes in the bargain. That's Captain Brown of the army, and you never met another like him."

The men were seated about upon the porch; but

arose immediately and came towards the boys, whose faces told how proud they were, and how glad now that it was all over. Captain Brown shook their hands again and again, as he heard the whole story from beginning to end, saying many times that the lads ought to enter West Point in a body that very fall; that the country needed just such fellows.

"I hardly know how I'm to thank you for the very pleasant surprise you have given me," said the captain, grinning with delight, as he clapped the handcuffs on Cabrillo's wrists. "But I can say that we crossed the trail of at least a dozen deer at noon, and that we saw them soon after entering the flint ridges, which lie five miles due west."

"Good!" cried the club, with a gusto that made the woods ring. "Hurrah for Captain Brown!"

"You couldn't have told us anything else that would have pleased us half so much, captain," said Walter, when the cheer had died away. "We've had so much of outlaws lately, that we're all anxious to have a chase as soon as possible, and we're delighted to hear that game is so near."

"Then, if you'll allow me, I'll take the men off your hands."

"Certainly; and the treasure box, too. I suppose it's all right for us to ride the horses?"

"To be sure. They'll go to you, anyway, with a large reward to boot," replied the genial soldier.

The following hour was spent in assisting the soldiers and their friends in getting everything ready for the start; for the captain had said, while declining Walter's invitation to remain overnight, that it was his obvious duty to make an early report.

"But we'll be back to see you soon," said the captain, as he waved a good-by to the lads; "and then we'll have a hunt with you and a look at the camps."

That was the last he said, for the horses were soon out of sight among the jack-oaks, and our heroes were left to enjoy their hunts and excursions as only manly good fellows can.

"A herd of deer not six miles away," cried Harry, galloping out to the stable. "Think of it, fellows, and then cast your eyes over these greyhounds, fairly asking for a trial, and as fit to run as can be."

"Yes; and so are the horses," added Arthur, running his eye over the five splendid animals, which made Eugene's gray mustang look smaller than he really was.

"Then let's give them a rest this afternoon, and a gallop in the morning," said Jack.

"That's the way to talk," agreed Pietro. "And you might have a look at your saddles and bridles. I'll see to the horses' legs."

Accordingly, the remainder of the day was spent in a careful examination of saddles and bridles, and in dispensing with every useless article that would

tend to make any extra weight; for it was clear that a Mexican saddle, with all its paraphernalia, was far too heavy to use in a deer chase.

"I'm going to use my English saddle," said Harry, as the boys joined him in the saddle room, "for it's twenty pounds lighter."

Jack always rode in a flat saddle, while Walter had an English saddle in addition to his heavy Mexican.

"You fellows can't get much the best of me," said Eugene, as he approached with the lightest kind of a racing saddle. "I brought this with me, thinking I would need it for an occasion of just this kind."

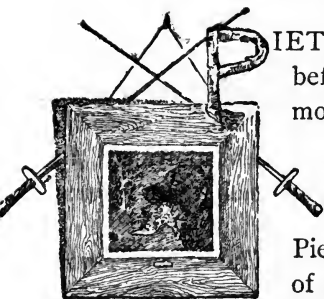
"You mean to give the gray all possible chance, I see," said Walter.

"Yes, for he's going to cover himself with glory. At least, I think so."

The time was then spent in selecting and polishing bits and bridles, and in having a much-needed rest. They climbed the stairs early; some to dream of outlaws and their retreats, and others to chase the lightning bound of the deer, or feel the wonderful stride of the horses quicken beneath them, and hear the dull clatter of flying hoofs before and behind, as the gallant animals strive to close the gap that separates them from the flying pack.

CHAPTER XVII

THE DEER CHASE



PIETRO and Tony were up long before sunrise the following morning. Pietro to feed and groom the chargers, and Tony to prepare a tempting breakfast. By the time Pietro had finished with three of the animals, and as he stood admiring their satin coats, the lads came tumbling down-stairs one after another, as eager for the chase as either the horses or the dogs.

"They're looking tip-top, Pietro," said Walter, as his experienced eye fell upon Leveller and Ramble-wild.

"Yes; and they're feelin' like a bunch of two-year-olds," replied the hostler. "You'll have a cool north wind most of the day, Master Walter, for which you may be glad. Come up on the south side of the ridge, and drive towards the creek. There's less timber that way."

"As I thought. And now, fellows, we'll turn in and have some bacon and coffee."

Breakfast was soon over, and then came the operation of faultlessly saddling and bridling the animals. As the lads wore riding boots, trousers, and shirts only, their respective weights were considerably lessened by the absence of their heavy cartridge belts and pistols.

The dogs had been shut up the entire night after being fed, but were now freed without a morning meal, and leaping about the horses sportively, as though they understood what was coming, and meant to do their best.

"Are you ready, boys?" asked Harry, who stood struggling with Ramblewild's bridle-rein. "This fellow is as impatient as he can be."

"And so are the hounds," added Walter, mounting his handsome chestnut.

"Good luck to you, boys," called Pietro and Larraby, as the horses moved off. "Keep a steady rein and hand, and pick your course."

"Thanks; we'll try to," answered the lads.

And now the thoroughbreds pulled, and fretted, and swerved in their impatience to extend their gallant limbs in the fresh morning air. Ramblewild, unused to the light saddle and rider, and still lighter hand, put his head between his knees in an endeavor to draw Harry over his withers, while Exile reared

again and again straight upright, fidgeting after the greyhounds in a longing to be off; Prince Royal, a stranger to the coursers, viewed the proceedings with nostrils dilated, until the scarlet tinge on them glowed in the rising sun. As for Leveller, he was by far too old and tried to mind the excitement about him, and only wondered why such an old campaigner as Osage Chief should show such quivering muscles and flashing eyes.

"It's the day for a chase, if we ever had one," said Walter, as the horses struck a cool, swinging canter. "Harry, you'll lead the bunch without doubt. The bay looks ready at a touch to take the lead."

"And so do the dogs," answered the boy, watching the coursers as they paused to snuff the air.

"Yes; they've had a good rest, and will make a good race," said Walter, noting the condition of each animal. "Call them in, Gene. They'll be after a rabbit in another moment. We'd better keep in this trail, as we'll be less likely to start one here."

And so the distance to the flint ridges was completed. The lads made a wide circle so as not to alarm the stags, and then halted to tighten saddle-girths in a little sheltered glade at the base of the ridge. As they remounted and rode slowly forward, the horses twitched with passionate impatience at their bits, and threatened every now and then to send their riders hurling through the air.

The lads wore no gold-broidered jackets to catch the eye of the deer, no scarlet coats to alarm the stags a mile away. They advanced slowly through the tall grass and sparse jack-oaks, too intent upon the ridge to mind the swerving, impatient animals, and too brown and sombre to be seen by the two stags that were clashing antlers a quarter mile away, clear in a broad band of sunlight. On their left the prairie stretched unbroken to the horizon, while just beyond them the ridge sloped gently down to the level, here and there studded with a clump of bushes.

And now the greyhounds began snuffing the air more often, advancing with their lean heads cocked on one side, and trembling in every limb like a pennant fluttering in the breeze, ready at a sight or sound of game to leap forward with their wondrous strides, and to race the most gallant stag to death.

In an instant a branch cracked on the left, and a doe, launching into a sweeping run, flew from them like an arrow, straight for the battling stags.

"Hie on, Tasso!" yelled Walter, as the greyhounds closed with a rush that made them scarcely distinguishable. "Down with her, Tasso!"

The next second the horses had swerved to the left, and were running, with pricked ears, clear of the woodland, just on the edge of the prairie. Another instant and the herd broke from the covert like lightning at the noise of alarm, and rushed with the

speed of the wind straight down the slope, the stags' antlers gleaming and flashing in the sunlight, and their eyes telling the true story of their fright.

As the pack followed in hot pursuit, Tasso and Saxony leading by a dozen yards, the boys set up a yell that caused the frightened deer to swerve to the right with the exception of one stag, which continued to sweep down the incline, followed by the now fairly flying hounds, whose wonderful strides became faster and faster, until they seemed hardly to touch the ground at all.

"Tasso! Tasso!" yelled Walter again, as the blue greyhound opened up a gap of daylight before Saxony. "Stop him, Tasso!"

The gallant greyhound heard his master's cry, and launched faster out, which caused the stag's tail to fly up as he quickened his enormous leaps.

In a moment after the herd broke from the thicket, our heroes, trembling with excitement, settled firmly in their saddles and took a quick glance at the prairie beyond; for they realized, as the horses tore after the hounds that now streamed in front of them, that no bit or bridle could check their headlong flight, that words were useless, and that they must follow in that neck-or-nothing chase until the trembling limbs could stride no longer, and watch the greyhounds race the deer.

And how they did race! Startled, and fresh from

the cool wandering of the night, the stag ran as only a frightened stag can, over the sun-warmed prairie, straight for the creek, whose green woodlands shone against the clear blue of the summer sky.

The horses had got their heads, and were determined to keep them. Ramblewild went to the front at once, and ran with his head high in the air, his hoofs sounding on the grass like dull thunder. Leveller came next, his master vainly struggling to get him under control, while Exile, carrying Paul's light form as though it were a mere feather on his back, thundered just behind. Blue Rocket, Prince Royal, and Osage Chief followed in the order named. Try as Eugene did, he could not catch the others, and the lad's heart sank within him as the space between Osage Chief and Prince Royal increased. The gray struggled bravely on, but was no match for the others.

On fled the stag, on rushed the dogs and horses; faster and faster, until the greyhounds had gained half the intervening space, and the air rang with the shouts of "Tasso beats!" "Now for it!" "Rambler's gaining!" "Diana's past Saxony!" "Not yet!" "He'll make the timber!" "Tasso gets him!" "The stag's gaining!" "Boomerang stops!" "Take him, Tasso!" There was a reckless, almost breathless, pleasure in that wild ride down the prairie, with the greyhounds and stag running as they never ran

before, with the thoroughbreds thundering after, their breath hot in each other's nostrils, and the grass-land flying past beneath.

How the lads pitied, even at that very moment, their many friends who had never seen a greyhound fairly launching forth with his wondrous stride, and had never felt the excitement that comes with a gallop at full speed across an open country, when the dull thunder of the flying gallop and the bracing currents of the summer wind seem to blend, and the foam from the hunters' mouths is flying on each other's withers!

And now, as Rambler joined Tasso and vied with him for the lead, Walter came up with Harry, and the two raced neck and neck, side by side, neither gaining nor losing an inch, until it seemed as though the others were as much interested in them as in the greyhounds; for they called, "Harry wins!" "Walt's got him!" "The chestnut's winning!" "The bay gains!" "Nose by nose, but Harry'll beat him!"

Carried along at a pace they had never before known, the boys displayed wonderful judgment in keeping their mounts well together and in selecting the flattest country.

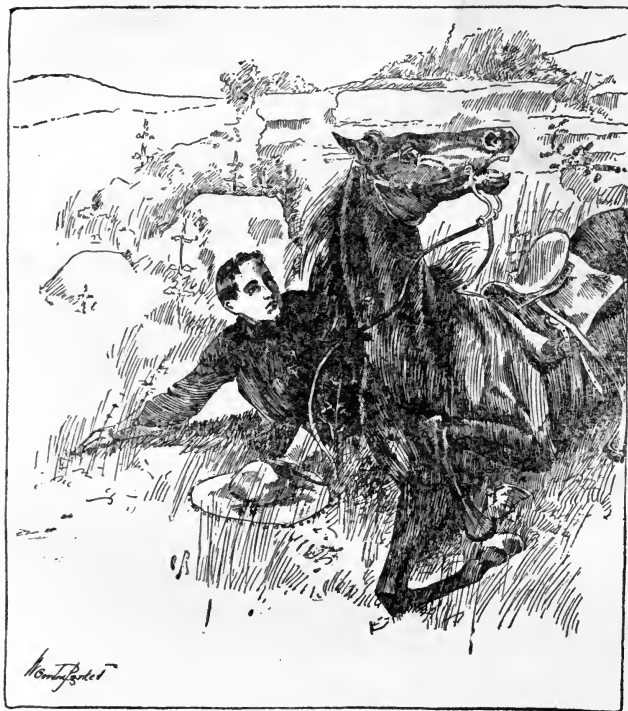
By this time Rambler and Tasso had come within striking distance of the stag, which was now running at right angles with the original course, in the direc-

tion the others had fled. It was plain that he was beginning to tire, for his stride lacked the wonderful spontaneity he had shown during the first two miles, his tongue protruded badly, and his every movement showed that the greyhounds, running game, true and straight, were about to make their first strike at his throat.

But now, for the first time, Walter saw that the stag had been approaching a little cliff, and was about to go over it. The dogs pressed him closely, and just missed his throat at the first attempt. They straightened themselves in an instant, as the wild shouts of their masters reached their ears, and then stag and coursers leaped from sight, soon followed by the remainder of the pack.

"Here! here!" cried Walter, as he jerked Leveller's right rein violently, just succeeding in turning him into a hollow that sloped gently to the lower ground. "Turn in here, fellows, or you'll go over the cliff!"

As he spoke, those following saw their peril and managed to turn their horses' heads in time to avoid the rising ground. But it was too late for Harry. He heard the cry with the rest, and leaned far back, with his legs straight before him, endeavoring with all his strength to check Ramblewild's mad rush for the cliff. He might as well have pulled upon a wain-rope about an oak tree. Whether it was the loss of



HARRY GOES OVER THE CLIFF.



blood caused by his encounter with the wildcat, or the fact that Ramblewild's headlong flight had thoroughly terrified him, the boy could never tell. He knew that he pressed his knees close to the animal's shoulders, and pulled back until the cliff looked hazy, finally swimming beneath his eyes. He heard his brother's shouts high above the others, felt the bay slow perceptibly, then felt himself lifted high into the air, land with a dull thud, and roll from the saddle. Ramblewild lay upon his breast a moment, his forelegs resting on the ground slightly in advance, and then struggled to his feet, none the worse for the tumble.

As Harry missed the sloping ground and started towards the cliff at that terrific pace, his friends seemed to forget everything else in their anxiety.

"Harry! Harry!" shouted Arthur, at the top of his lungs. "Drop off, or he'll kill you!" The others could not say so much, and only called "Harry! Harry!" in husky voices.

The other horses swept down the incline to the low ground, and their riders saw, to their great joy, that Harry had risen to his feet, and was not seriously injured. Walter, who was of course leading, then looked in the direction of the stag, which had turned sharply to the left upon striking the ground. All he saw was the tail end of the greyhounds disappearing again to the left, and called to Harry to mount the

cliff as he swept past, while the others continued up the low ground until they reached another incline that ran from the hollow.

As Harry reached the summit of the cliff, he could see the trusty greyhounds striking at the stag's throat time and time again. The rest of the pack were closing now, and as Tasso took a firm hold of his throat, down went the animal, heels over head, but was on his feet before the sweeping pack had reached him, and had increased his speed again.

The dogs were gaining fast now, however, and closed upon the gallant deer with the speed of the wind. Again Tasso rose for the strike, his jaws gleaming, and his lean head stretched far out for the effort. He left the prairie like a tennis ball, and rose with one crowning impulse of the trembling limbs; one bound in mid air, and the stag dropped again to his knees, rolling over and over upon a sandy spot, until stag and greyhounds became one snapping, snarling mass. The horses, by this time under whip and spur, thundered down upon the stag: Exile a half-length in the lead, with Leveller and Blue Rocket close up, and Prince Royal gaining at every stride.

"Hurrah, Arthur!" shouted Harry, as his former favorite flew by Blue Rocket like a shot. "Give him his head! Give him his head!"

Arthur gave the rushing black freer rein, and

struck him for the first time with the spur. In an instant he shot to the front, and tore after the retreating pack.

As the horses struck the sandy spot where Tasso had thrown the stag, a great cloud of dust flew from their heels, and as they continued to plunge through the dry and sandy ground, it seemed as if they towed from their saddle-girths some furlong lengths of glossless golden silk.

Sweeping before, as if their very lives depended upon it, the greyhounds, so sure of fang, rose at every leap, and brought the struggling stag once, twice, thrice to his knees.

Saxony, Diamond, and Diana would throw him, and then Boomerang, Rambler, and Tasso, panting like tired engines, rose through the air and fell with the gallant deer.

The prairie stretched before them, green and level, waving in the fresh northerly breeze, and shimmering in the sunlight. The dogs now ran close together, their wondrous strides lengthening, quickening, gathering all for the final effort. Boomerang led slightly, Saxony following, the others lapped.

"Hie on, boys!" cried Walter, whose foaming chestnut was head and head with Prince Royal.

"Down with him, Tasso!"

And Tasso, who had lost ground since the last time he had thrown the stag, now heard his master's

wild shouts of encouragement, and passed the others like a shot from a rifle.

"Once again, Tasso!" cried the excited Walter at the top of his lungs. "Once again, boy!"

"Rambler! Rambler!" shouted Paul, as the courser neither lost nor gained, but ran straight and true as steel in the very centre of the pack. "On with you, Rambler!"

The stag, now swerving slightly to the left, began to act as though he meant to turn and fight; for he seemed to quicken his speed in an endeavor to throw himself about and face the dogs. Too closely pressed, he again started with his nose straight before him. Tasso, Saxony, and Diamond rose together, struck true at the stag's dripping throat, and down they all went in a heap—fighting, snapping, snarling, until the air was filled with their sounds.

Walter saw that the end was near, and that the stag would never again fly before the gleaming greyhound fangs. He, Paul, and Arthur put spurs to their mounts, and raced neck and neck to the death, followed by Jack's Blue Rocket and Eugene's gray mustang, which had been last the entire way.

The stag was no match for the six dogs, for Tasso and Saxony held him by the throat, while the others cut him with their fangs, like a knife, a dozen times before he could struggle to his knees; but he rose only for a moment, and then, bellowing like a bull,

fell back in the death struggle, while the air rang again and again with our heroes' wild cries.

"Hurrah for the Greyhound Club!" cried Paul, dismounting from the honest Exile. "Walt, you're a brick!"

"Where's Harry?" asked Arthur, after the cheers for the club had been given with a will.

"He's coming slowly," said Eugene, turning in his saddle; "for Ramblewild's lame."

"Well he might be," replied Walter. "Harry's the luckiest fellow in the world."

And so the others thought. When the lad came up, the chase was discussed enthusiastically, the dogs were praised and petted, and another cheer was given that must have reached the lodge.

"Harry, you come up behind me," said Walter, examining Ramblewild's swollen and trembling forelegs. "Paul, you take the stag on Exile, and Arthur will lead the bay. That will make it easy all around."

"Are we going straight for the lodge?" asked Harry, examining a bruise on his right arm. "I'd like to get some water pretty soon."

"I thought of making for a spring that starts among those rocks," replied Walter, pointing towards the creek. "We'll all enjoy a drink, I guess."

The stag was thrown across the saddle in front of Paul, Arthur took Ramblewild's bridle, and Harry jumped up behind Walter. The boys all enjoyed the

rest and drink at the spring as much as the dogs, and discussed the morning's sport from beginning to end. When the horses had cooled off, the saddles were replaced, and the ride to the lodge was begun. They arrived in time for a good lunch, and spent the remainder of the day in giving Pietro and Larraby a glowing description of the chase, and in assisting in removing the stag's skin. The horses were thoroughly bandaged, and Ramblewild's legs were looked after by the hostler.

"We'll have venison to-morrow," said Jack, as he watched Tony dress the carcass. "If we have any visitors now, we'll be able to feed them on the fat of the land."

The boys did not receive another visit for some days, however, and then it was too late to offer any of the first deer killed at the lodge. In fact, they did not think of it, for Uncle John had other things to talk about.



CHAPTER XVIII

CONCLUSION

“WELL, boys, what am I to say to you?” asked Mr. Hillman, good humoredly, lighting his pipe after he had heard the lads’ stories from the beginning of the trouble to the very end of the deer chase. “You’ve placed yourselves in all sorts of dangers, contrary to promises, and have made heroes of yourselves into the bargain. I was never more astounded in my life. Captain Brown sent me word that he had been scouting on his own hook, and had dropped in at the lodge for any information, and also for something to eat. I don’t blame him for being surprised when Tony told him that three of the outlaws were up-stairs, bound hand and foot, and the others were expected at any moment. Do you?”

“No, not at all, Uncle John,” replied Walter. “But then, you see, they ran right into our hands.”

“That red-headed man they call Firefly didn’t,” answered Uncle John, who was glad to acknowledge to himself that the lads were made of “just the right stuff.” “And that bit of scouting on Harry’s part was very commendable, even though he did desert

his post. You've had some exciting times, my lad, have you not?"

Harry flushed to the temples at this, but did not reply.

"Well," Uncle John continued, with a twinkle in his eye, "you boys will have a fine time at the academy next winter. You'll have a bushel basketful of applications for membership awaiting you, and you'll be asked to relate your experiences three times a day. If you have that club room I hear you talking of, you'll have to have a visitor's day, or you'll be overrun with inquisitive students, who'll ask to see some of Cabrillo's relics, and so on."

"How will they know about it?" asked Arthur.

"Know!" exclaimed Uncle John. "The whole country knows, and I tell you I've been busy answering telegrams from your parents, boys. They have finally consented to allow you to remain; but they distinctly state that you are to return to the ranch if you hear anything of 'dodgers' of any description. Wouldn't you like to come back with me?"

"Oh, no, Uncle John," protested Harry, with an earnestness that made the genial old gentleman laugh outright. "We've just got horses to suit us, and expect no end of fun coursing with them."

"Are they very fast?"

"Yes; we're all delighted, and hope to kill a dozen deer before the season's over," replied Harry.

"Well, boys, I'll stay and have a hunt with you,

while the herdsmen go below and drive up some cattle. I'm not so old that I can't ride a couple of days behind the hounds without feeling it."

"You're not going to ride that old bone-yard, are you?" asked Walter in alarm, as his eye fell upon Mr. Hillman's ugly-looking mount. "I thought he died six years ago. I'll be glad to let you have Leveller."

"Never mind, my lad, but I thank you just the same," replied his uncle, with a smile that spoke volumes.

Of course the club was delighted to have Uncle John join them in a hunt, and started to drive the ridges again the next day. Harry rode Prince Royal, while Arthur returned to his old mount.

Homely as Uncle John's horse was, he nevertheless made an excellent race, and the lads were forced to go to the whips during the entire last mile in order to keep daylight between them and the old frontiersman. When the deer was at last caught after a splendid chase, and the lads had dismounted and stood by their horses, which were panting violently, they noticed that the "bone-yard," beaten only a half-dozen lengths, began cropping the grass after but a moment's quick breathing. After that they had nothing to say against the "bone-yard," and always remembered that a horse's coat did not make the animal.

Uncle John spent nearly a week with the lads, and then returned to the ranch. He had been kind enough to ask the boys to visit him on their way back, and they were glad to accept the hospitable invitation.

"When we get to the ranch," he said, just before leaving, "I'll send Larraby with the papers. They'll interest you about as much as anything else."

Uncle John not only found the newspapers at the ranch when he returned, but also a lengthy communication from the governor of Oklahoma, in which he desired to thank the young sportsmen of Deer Lodge for their valuable services in acting in the interests of the country, and asked them to select any of the outlaws' horses they might care to own, together with any articles that struck their fancy at Cabrillo's camp. Pietro and Larraby each received a very liberal reward, enclosed in the same letter.

Uncle John forwarded the letter and papers at once, and it is needless to say that the contents of both thoroughly amused and delighted our heroes. There were sketches of the entire club in the papers, and there was also a realistic drawing of Cabrillo's capture. The outlaw was pictured as a Mexican villain, with long hair and rings in his ears, struggling with the six members of the club, who were all about him, some with lariats, which had settled over his head and were drawn tight, and others advancing with clenched fists.

"About as near as newspapers ever get to accounts of this kind," said Harry, smiling in spite of himself, as he noted the expressions the artist had given the different members.

Another paper, which also gave a glowing description of the affair, contained a sketch entitled "How the Boys of Deer Lodge amuse Themselves." This was by far the most amusing of any; for there was a very poorly proportioned deer in the centre, hotly pursued by a mastiff and a St. Bernard; while in another sketch, just to the right, a young man was landing a brook trout by a mountain stream. The corresponding illustration on the left showed a youth in a hammock, reading Cicero, while upon the ground lay a copy of Virgil and a Greek grammar. There could be no doubt of this, for the letters were plainly marked upon the covers.

"If that man had any better knowledge of this country, I don't know how I'd stand it," said Paul, dryly, which caused the others to burst into a hearty laugh.

Soon after the receipt of the letter and newspapers, the boys received a communication from the Santa Fé railroad, which enclosed annual passes for the members of the club, and went on to say how fortunate the railroad had been in having the band dispersed, and that they, the officials of the road, desired to extend their very hearty thanks, and wished them the most enjoyable of outings.

The lads selected a half dozen of Cabrillo's belongings to remind them of their adventures with the bandits, if indeed they needed reminders, while the articles left in the stone house were taken in charge by Captain Brown, who in turn delivered them to the proper authorities.

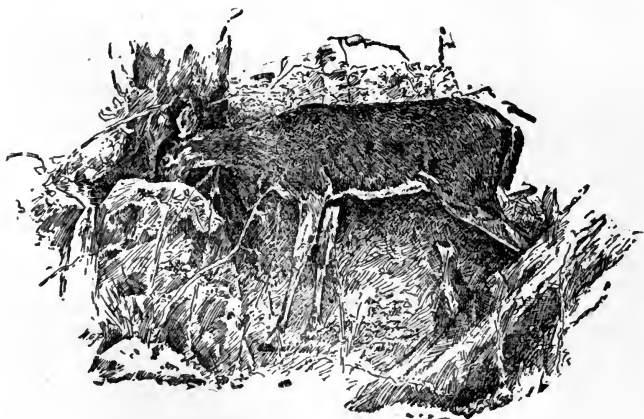
Nothing further was learned of Cabrillo's strange past life at the outlaws' trial, and the lads were forced to judge him from his surroundings. They were rather more sorry for him than for the rest; for they were confident that he would have spent his life more honorably if it had not been for the corrupting influences of his youth.

The club had many enjoyable times during the remainder of the summer; but none, you may be sure, half as thrilling as the events that transpired during the first week spent at the lodge. They made many trips to the outlaws' camps, where they frequently ate their lunches, discussing their adventures over and over again. So the summer passed pleasantly, and towards the end of August the lads packed their trunks and started for the ranch.

After a very enjoyable visit with Colonel Hillman and Uncle John, the boys returned to the academy, where they were indeed heroes. Uncle John's words proved true. The lads' many friends were never tired of discussing the outlaws and the hunts the six young hunters had taken, and the club room at the

academy was always well filled with congenial companions after study hours. Perhaps we shall meet our heroes again at no very distant date, and tell you something of their lives at the academy.

Harry and Walter were the closest chums that winter, and often discussed the outlaws and greyhounds as they sat about the fire during the long winter evenings. They both had good cause to remember most forcibly many thrilling events connected with the first outing of the Greyhound Club. And though they often recalled the wildcat encounter, the bear hunt, and deer chase with quickening breaths, it is safe to say that nothing impressed them half so much as the voice of the imprisoned outlaw, ringing through the glade in the still of the night, "Silver and gold! silver and gold!"





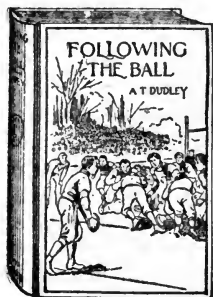
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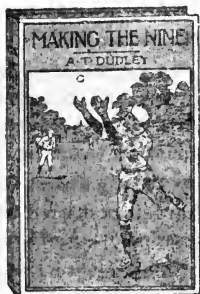
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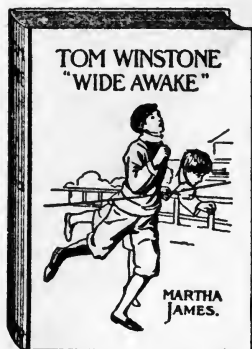
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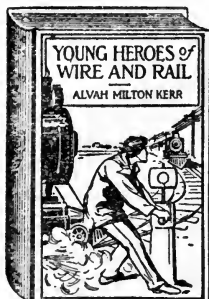
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"'My Friend Jim,' " was the brief reply.

"Is it good?"

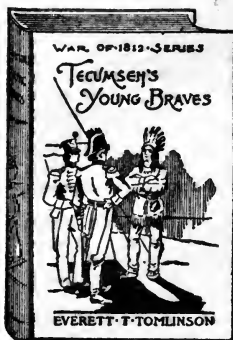
"Well, I guess; it's a dandy!" and with an impatient gesture that indicated that he did not want to be further interrupted, he turned his back toward his questioner and buried his face in his book.

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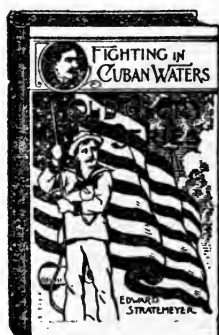
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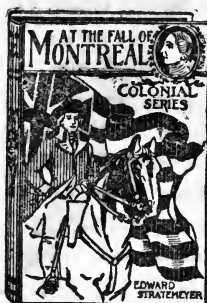
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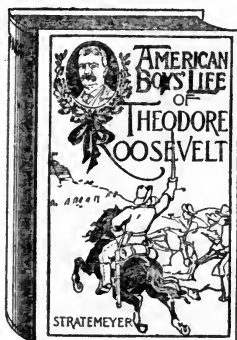
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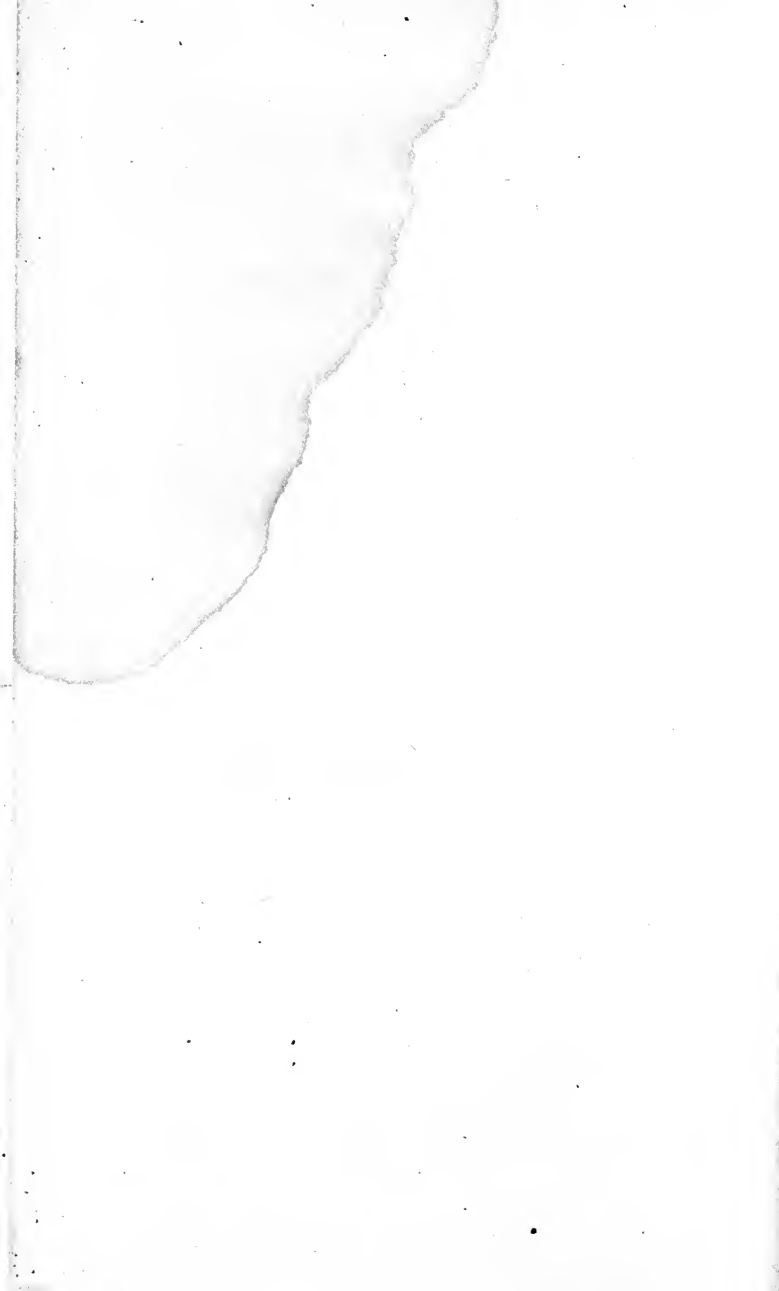
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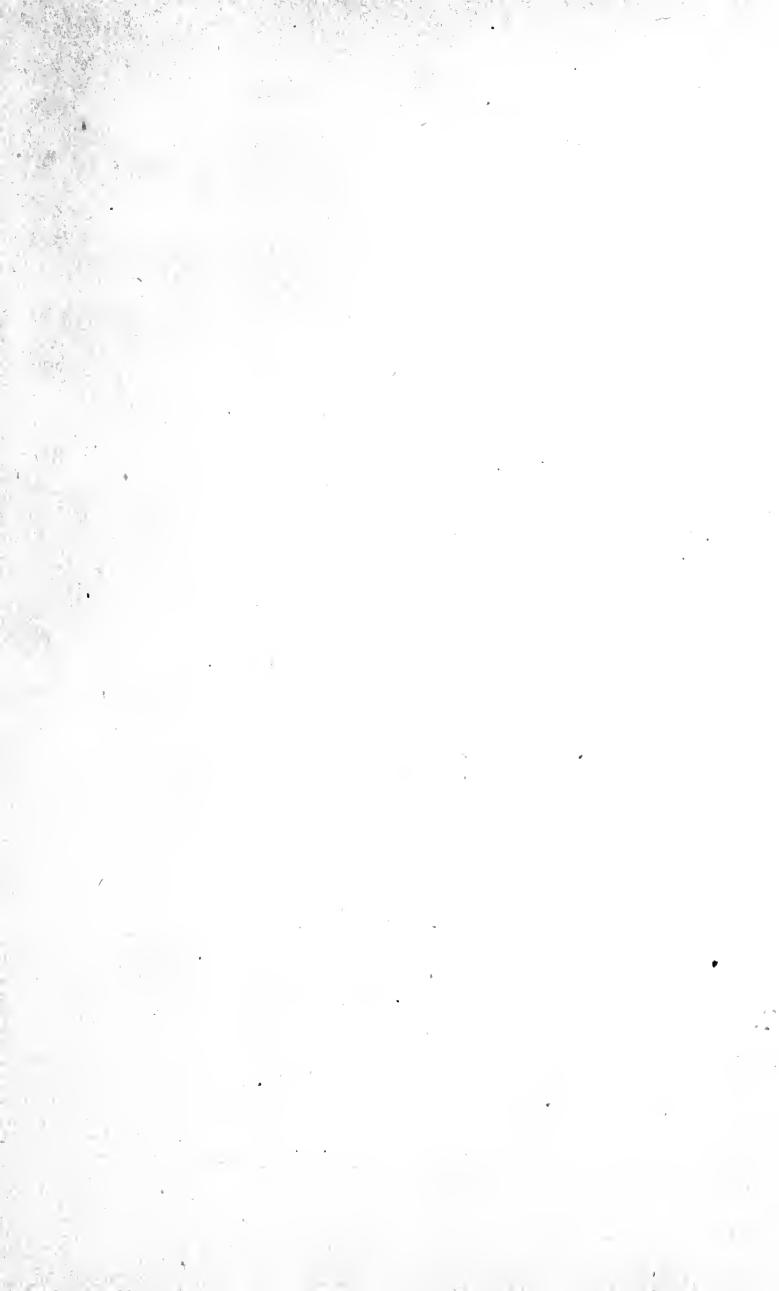
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